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***Poetry as a Way of Being:  
Poetics of Care in Heidegger, Emerson, Wordsworth, and  
Cavell***

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## Lay Summary

This work argues that care, particularly as German philosopher Martin Heidegger defines it, is a concept that is useful for the study of literature, especially poetry and poetics, and for the study of the history of ideas—notably ideas pertaining to literary theory and criticism. This thesis also contributes to academic discussions of works by Heidegger (1889-1976), by the American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), by the British poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850), and by the American philosopher Stanley Cavell (1926-2018). Focusing chiefly on those four authors, I discuss the philosophical origins, legacies, and implications of the idea that poetry manifests care—which, simply put, means that poetry conveys a way of being, of relating to things and people.

Chapter One discusses Heidegger's ideas about poetry and about care, arguing that poetry as his later work describes it manifests what his early work calls authentic care. In other words, I show how, according to Heidegger, poetry conveys and fosters a respectful and affective attention to what things or people fundamentally are. Chapter Two turns to Emerson's works and traces therein some of the origins of Heidegger's ideas about poetry. I show how Emerson's views on poetry anticipate Heidegger's in several ways, and how, even though they are expressed in literary terms—including in his poem "Each and All"—those ideas have philosophical meaning, depth, and scope. Chapter Three then finds some of the origins of Heidegger and Emerson's ideas in Wordsworth's prose works about poetry—including in the ways the latter are influenced by the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume. The second half of that chapter analyses and discusses Wordsworth's poem "The Thorn," and demonstrates how the concept of care offers new ways of reading and interpreting that poem. The fourth and last chapter discusses the legacies of the ideas explored in chapters one to three by studying what Cavell writes about them. Drawing on analyses by contemporary philosophers Sandra Laugier, Stephen Mulhall, and Simon Critchley, I demonstrate that the notion that poetry manifests care reveals philosophical and ethical connections between Cavell's ideas, those discussed in the previous chapters, and care ethics.

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the idea that care is a notion that is relevant to the study of literary theory, its history, and the study of literature, especially poetry and poetics. Care is as a notion under which are subsumed a range of behaviours and activities that preserve or promote the integrity or wellbeing of things or beings, and that involve taking care, being careful, caring, attentive and respectful. The field of care ethics discusses various aspects of such a notion of care, but not its relation to poetry, which is what this investigation explores.

Chapter One thus turns to the works of Martin Heidegger, who wrote about both care and poetry, in order to establish the philosophical relevance of the notion of care for literary theory. The chapter demonstrates how poetry manifests and pertains to what Heidegger calls authentic care through poetry's acknowledgment and opening up of semantic and ontological wealth, which preserves and respects a thing or person's Being. Chapter Two then discusses the works of another thinker who wrote several essays on poetry—Ralph Waldo Emerson—and demonstrates how his ideas constitute some of the origins of the notion that poetry manifests care. This is achieved by revealing the phenomenological and ontological scope of Emerson's views and by showing how his poem "Each and All" manifests authentic care. Going even further back in the history of ideas about poetry, Chapter Three studies William Wordsworth's poetics. This chapter highlights Wordsworth's proto-phenomenological claims about poetry and the ordinary, and it argues that these both testify to an engagement with the legacies of David Hume's philosophy, and lay some of the foundations of the idea that poetry manifests care—as further demonstrated by an analysis of his poem "The Thorn." The fourth and final chapter, centred on Stanley Cavell, traces the legacies, in his works, of the ideas about poetry and care put forward by the authors discussed in chapters one to three. This chapter demonstrates how Cavell's views, notably about how Romanticism constitutes a response to scepticism, provide further arguments supporting the idea that poetry manifests care. This idea, the chapter concludes, implies ways of being and of relating to things and to people that share core characteristics with those both Cavell and care ethicists describe as ethically and socio-politically valuable.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, by uncovering some of the philosophical filiations and affiliations of the idea that poetry manifests care, this investigation endeavours to contribute to the study of the history of ideas—of theories about literature and poetry in particular. Second, this investigation hopes to make contributions to the field of literary theory and criticism, particularly poetics, by showing how asking a literary text whether it contains ideas pertaining to the notion that poetry manifests care uncovers new philosophical aspects within. Third, this exploration seeks to contribute to Heidegger, Emerson, Wordsworth, and Cavell scholarship, not only by demonstrating the philosophical connections between these authors' ideas, but also by providing new interpretations and ways of reading these authors' works, and by uncovering new relationships between poetry, phenomenology, ontology, and ethics therein.

## Acknowledgement

I am extremely grateful for the help and advice I have received over the years from many people and institutions, including my academic supervisors, colleagues, friends, and family members, but there is only one person I wish to thank above all others, and that is my wife Faiza, whose unflinching support, in the many forms it has taken, has been invaluable.

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## Introduction

This work investigates the idea that care is a notion that is relevant to the study of literary theory, its history, and the study of literature—especially poetry and poetics. This may appear surprising given that care is a term that calls to mind socio-medical contexts (care homes, palliative care, caretakers, etc.) and the idea of looking after or of being attentive to the needs of someone or something. Although there are articles in medical journals about the relevance of poetry in hospitals, and even though this suggests that poetry fosters care, this investigation will not explore such claims nor discuss socio-medical environments.<sup>1</sup> This study will discuss the notion of care—and its relation to poetry—in a less context-specific and in a more fundamental and universal way. When performing most tasks one can indeed take care, be careful, caring, attentive, respectful, or helpful towards someone or something, in many contexts and ways. As in a medical context, however, such a more general, ordinary, and ubiquitous understanding of care calls to mind positive or ethical actions and behaviours—activities that preserve or promote the integrity or wellbeing of things or beings, whether human or not. Such broader definitions of care are discussed by philosophers, including care ethicists, who argue that “care activities are central and ubiquitous”—as contemporary French philosopher Sandra Laugier puts it in an article entitled “The Ethics of Care as a Politics of the Ordinary”: “Care is everywhere, and it is such a pervasive part of the human form of life that it is never seen for what it is: a range of activities by which we organize our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. When we get down to the ways in which we actually live our lives, care activities are central and ubiquitous” (226). If care is “everywhere” yet “is never seen for what it is,” that is to say, if care characterises many of our everyday activities without us being aware of it, does poetry also have something to do with care? Given the philosophical nature of this question and of the broad understanding of care that it implies, in order to find an answer and explore the relationship between poetry and such a fundamental conception of care, it is necessary to turn to equally broad and philosophical understandings of poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> The following articles discuss poetry and care in medical contexts: “Healing the Healer: Poetry in Palliative Care” by Jack Coulehan and Patrick Clary (2005), and “Poetry as Self-Care and Palliative Care” by Steven Radwany, David Hassler, Nicole Robinson, Melissa Soltis, and Rod Myerscough (2012)—both published in *The Journal of Palliative Medicine*.



Indeed, turning only to poets and their work would be limiting, just as turning to medical practitioners of care would yield a narrower and more specific understanding of care. That is to say, just as there may be more to care than what nurses do in care homes, so too may there be more to poetry than poems. Moreover, what determines what counts as poetry, or even as a poem? For instance, how does one distinguish between a long lyrical poem written in prose and a particularly poetic short story that is experimental in its form? Looking beyond sets of words on a page and towards less traditional and more contemporary forms, why, and when, can a webpage displaying a sequence of words and pictures be considered to be a poem, or an animated short film be considered to be poetry? The adjective 'poetic' is also used to describe very different kinds of works of art, such as dance, music, and contemporary art installations that use a wide range of media. Considerations such as these and questions about what poetry is and implies can also be found in philosophical works, such as those by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. His essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" contains statements such as "Language itself is poetry in the essential sense," "The nature of art is poetry," and "Poetry is thought of here in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate unity of being with language and word, that we must leave open whether art, in all its modes from architecture to poesy, exhausts the nature of poetry" (*Poetry* 72). It is clear from Heidegger's words that, according to him, it is possible to think of poetry as an overarching and pervasive notion which is central to art and language itself. Without going, in these introductory paragraphs, into the details of reasons why Heidegger makes such broad claims about poetry and why Laugier makes broad claims about care, what both philosophers' words indicate is that it is within philosophical understandings of both care and poetry that an overlap between what those two words encompass may be uncovered.

Chapter One of this investigation is thus devoted to the study of Heidegger's works, as he is the philosopher who has, to my knowledge, written the most about both care and poetry. Indeed, not only did he write several essays about poetry, he also held that care is a fundamental and ubiquitous part of human life: in *Being and Time*, where he uses the term *Dasein* (literally 'being there') to refer to who we are as human beings, he thus claims that "Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care" (322). I mentioned the ethics of care at the start of this introduction—and I mention them again in the concluding paragraphs of Chapter Four—because broad philosophical discussions of the concept of care mostly take place, nowadays, within that field; however, unlike Heidegger's works, those written by

care ethicists do not, as far as I know, discuss poetry in much detail. It is therefore more pertinent for this investigation to begin by focusing on the German philosopher's understandings of both care and poetry so as to try to find an overlap between those ideas within his works before moving on to other authors.<sup>2</sup> Even though Heidegger wrote about both care and poetry, finding the aforementioned overlap is not straightforward, particularly since he did not write about these topics together: his arguments about care are laid out primarily in his *magnum opus Being and Time*, a work which mentions poetry only briefly, while, conversely, many of his essays that focus on poetry do not discuss care and were written approximately two decades later. Heidegger's texts therefore do not provide a readily available answer to the question of the relationship between poetry and care, which is why Chapter One of this investigation will attempt to articulate this relationship. This will provide a Heideggerian answer to questions such as: does poetry manifest, display, foster, require or imply care? Is a poem the product of care—the outcome of a caring activity—or, the other way around, does poetry produce care—is care a result of poetry?

In spite of Heidegger's broad understanding of poetry that links it with art in general, my aim is not discuss the relevance that the concept of care may have for—nor its overlap with—all kinds of works of art, or the arts as a whole, but rather with poetry in a literary sense. Even though I have so far mentioned only philosophers and their broad understandings of care and poetry, this investigation—undertaken in the context of a department of English Literature—seeks to demonstrate the relevance that the concept of care has not only for the history of ideas about poetry, but also for poetics and literary criticism. That is one of the reasons why this study also features analyses of poems, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Each and All" in Chapter Two, and William Wordsworth's "The Thorn" in Chapter Three. As my study of works by Heidegger, Emerson, and Wordsworth in

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<sup>2</sup> Turning to Heidegger is all the more called for that even though Laugier's understanding of care, which I quoted earlier, has no direct link to Heidegger's, her article on the ethics of care mentions Joan Tronto whose seminal book on care ethics, *Moral Boundaries*, does mention the German philosopher. In a footnote to a sentence about how "except for some feminist thinkers, few moral philosophers have considered questions of care" (125), Tronto thus writes that "Martin Heidegger is among the exceptions" (208). Likewise, a footnote to a similar statement in the opening pages of her book (3) mentions people "who have urged me to take Heidegger's position more seriously" after admitting "I cannot do justice to Heidegger's ideas here" (182). This investigation's focus on poetry prevents it from discussing the extent to which Heidegger's understanding of care overlaps with that of care ethicists, but scholars curious to explore this question may find Chapter One of this study to be a relevant starting point for such an exploration.

the first three chapters—and in that order—takes me back in time, so too does this investigation explore ideas about poetry that gradually refer to more traditional understandings of poetry. However, in the fourth and final chapter, I turn to the philosophical views of the late Stanley Cavell whose post-Heideggerian works discuss the three authors studied in chapters one to three. Even though I use Cavell's ideas to further underscore the relevance the concept of care has for poetry in a literary sense, because the American philosopher has written not only about poetry but also about drama and film—amongst other topics in the arts—the arguments I put forward in the final chapter of this study are also pertinent, as are Heidegger and Emerson's ideas, for scholars interested in discussions of poetry in a much broader sense. I also wish to make clear that, while several of the views about poetry that I present and discuss in this study are prescriptive and normative, my work and the idea I put forward—that poetry manifests care—is not. That is to say, though the idea that poetry manifests care may be based on understandings of poetry that are at times normative and prescriptive, what I offer in putting forward this idea is merely a tool—for poetics, critical analysis, literary theory, and the history of ideas—that reveals philosophical connections within understandings of poetry all the while opening up interpretative possibilities when reading poetry.

One of the consequences of this investigation's study of both broad and specific instances and understandings of poetry is that the answer to the question of where, and how, care is manifested is not going to be a straightforward one. That is to say, this study comprises both arguments of a formalistic nature—about the intrinsic features of a work and how these manifest care—and arguments pertaining to reader-response criticism contending that care is manifested as an outcome of a reader's engagement with a work. The way a poem describes an object, or tells of the speaker's relationship to something or someone, may or may not manifest authentic care, depending, according to Heidegger, on the kind of being-in-the-world it reflects (*Being* 207), such as whether the thing described “unfold[s] world” (*Poetry* 197) by gathering “the fourfold” (*Poetry* 148) it is inscribed in. I explain Heidegger's views on this point in Chapter One and I argue in Chapter Two that Emerson's poem “Each and All” is an example of this given the architecture of the poem, some of its key words, and the way it makes use of sounds and imagery. However, the notion, discussed in this investigation, that poetry may be a manifestation of authentic care also implies that poetry is something that may occur, as an event. That is to say, poetry as a manifestation of authentic care also means that poetry may happen as the result of a

reader's encounter with, and understanding of, a poem. According to this view, the most poetical thing about a poem may be the interpretations to which it lends itself and the wealth of possible meanings to which it gives rise. This is a point I also discuss when reading Wordsworth's "The Thorn" in Chapter Three and it is one to which Cavell's ideas—particularly those related to how poetry constitutes a response to scepticism's quest for knowledge—lend additional support, as I argue in Chapter Four. As a result of this investigation's understandings of poetry, readers of this study may find that because Heidegger or Emerson's ideas offer broad conceptions—that lend themselves to several interpretations—of what poetry is, their prose texts are also poetic. Even though both thinkers also wrote poems and even though their philosophical works written in prose have a distinct style and formal characteristics—as is also the case of Cavell's—the literary qualities of the prose of the authors I discuss is not something I analyse in this investigation. I leave it to the reader to decide how poetic—as well as philosophical—Heidegger, Emerson, Wordsworth, and Cavell's works are. So as to clarify how this study goes the latter one after the other and what aspects I discuss therein, I will now provide a brief summary of the four chapters this study comprises.

This investigation begins, in the first half of Chapter One, with a breakdown of Heidegger's definition of care in his phenomenological work *Being and Time*, with a particular focus on what he calls "authentic care" (159). If, according to Heidegger, human beings always care in one way or another, some ways of caring are more respectful than others of what things or people are and may be (their Being).<sup>3</sup> "Authentic care" thus refers to behaviours, activities, or ways of being that let be, respect, and leave that Being open, instead of closing it off; what someone or something *is* and can be—even what a word or utterance means as well as the wealth of its potential meanings—is neither covered up, disrespected, supplanted, replaced nor ignored by this form of care. The central claim of this chapter is that poetry as Heidegger describes it, particularly in his later work, pertains to, and manifests, authentic care. To demonstrate this, the second half of Chapter One therefore reads some of Heidegger's later essays where poetry has a prominent place—particularly those found in the collection *Poetry, Language, Thought*—in light of his earlier work about care. This reading provides an explication of what poetry means for Heidegger all the while pointing out how the way in which he describes what poetry is and does—

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<sup>3</sup> I explain what I mean by "Being" and why I capitalise it in the opening of Chapter One.

particularly when he explains its relation to the notions of dwelling and building—shows that it manifests and pertains to authentic care. When poetry expresses, reveals and allows one to realise who or what someone or something is and can be, it manifests authentic care and pertains to the latter because poetry's acknowledgment and opening up of ontological and semantic wealth preserves and respects that thing or person's Being.

After demonstrating, in Chapter One, that there is a strong philosophical relationship between care and poetry in Heidegger's works, Chapter Two studies the works of another thinker who wrote extensively about poetry, Ralph Waldo Emerson. My aim will be to determine whether a similar relationship—the idea that poetry manifests and pertains to authentic care—is present in Emerson's works. There is a twofold reason for this aim. On the one hand, this will ascertain whether Heidegger's ideas about care are useful for the critical analysis of another thinker's ideas about poetry, that is to say, whether they help understand and reveal the philosophical implications of Emerson's poetics. On the other hand, reading Emerson's texts in light of Heidegger's will be a way of investigating some of the origins of Heidegger's idea that poetry manifests care, particularly given that Emerson had a significant influence on Friedrich Nietzsche, whose works Heidegger read, wrote about, and lectured on. The intellectual proximity between Heidegger and Emerson's ideas is such that Stanley Cavell argues that "Emerson's thought is, on a certain way of turning it, a direct anticipation of Heidegger's" (*Conditions* 38), while Emerson scholar Branka Arsić writes that "[w]ithout knowing it, one may say, Heidegger is waiting for Emerson" (324). The connections, hinted at by Cavell and Arsić, between Heidegger and Emerson are particularly strong and evident with regard to poetry. For instance, while Emerson writes, in his essay "The Poet," that "[e]very word was once a poem" (*Essays* 455), Heidegger claims, over a century later in "The Origin of the Work of Art," that "[l]anguage itself is poetry in the essential sense" (*Poetry* 72). This chapter therefore explores such similarities and demonstrates that the concept of care reveals the phenomenological and ontological aspects of Emerson's ideas about poetry all the while making the "direct anticipation" Cavell mentions more apparent. Moreover, Chapter Two will thereby prove, as the third and fourth chapters also will, that care is relevant not only for poetics beyond Heidegger's works, but also for the study of the history of ideas about poetry. An additional reason for turning to Emerson to investigate how care is relevant to the study of literary theory, its history, and the study of poetry and poetics, is that Sandra Laugier also writes about him. In her article "Transcendentalism and the Ordinary," she for instance explains

how Emerson is interested in—and calls to pay careful attention to—ordinary aspects of life, which the field of care ethics also discuss. The end of Chapter Two thus explores the ways in which Emerson’s poetics of the ordinary pertain to an understanding of poetry as a manifestation of care before reading one of his poems—“Each and All”—and demonstrating how it manifests authentic care.

Chapter Three also comprises the study both of a poem and of prose works by an author who, likewise, calls for poetic attention to the ordinary: William Wordsworth. Because Wordsworth and his interest in the ordinary influenced Emerson—who knew the British poet’s work and met him when he travelled to England—studying his ideas about poetry is a way of going further back into the history of poetics in order to determine whether some of the origins of idea that poetry manifests care lie therein. Starting with his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the first half of this chapter traces those origins back to the ways in which Wordsworth’s views on poetry contain proto-phenomenological claims that testify to an engagement with the legacies of David Hume’s epistemology, scepticism, and moral sentimentalism. Discussing some of the ways in which a Romantic poet’s work (Wordsworth’s) engages with a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher’s ideas (Hume’s) will further demonstrate the relevance that the philosophical concept of care has for poetics and its history.<sup>4</sup> The second half of Chapter Three then discusses Wordsworth’s poem “The Thorn” so as to show how it is a poem about care, including by looking at the ways in which it poetically expresses Wordsworth’s ideas regarding epistemology, scepticism, and moral sentimentalism. One of my reasons for choosing “The Thorn,” as opposed to other poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, is that Wordsworth wrote a long prefatory note to this poem, which I draw on while discussing the poem as it provides an opportunity to further discuss what Wordsworth understands his poetry to be and to do. I argue that “The Thorn” is a poem about care not only insofar as it is about a man’s relationship to something (a thorny bush) and to someone (a woman called Martha), but also because it interrogates those relationships, particularly the narrator’s inability to care authentically. This inability, I moreover contend, is partly due to the narrator’s scepticism.

This idea that scepticism can be a barrier to authentic care is also held, I argue in Chapter Four, by Stanley Cavell. While chapters two and three investigate some of the

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<sup>4</sup> Joan Tronto moreover discusses Hume’s ideas in *Moral Boundaries*, arguing that there is a link between care ethics and the Scottish philosopher’s moral philosophy: “the ethic of care will have some resemblances to Scottish thought” (58).

origins of the Heideggerian idea that poetry manifests care, this fourth and final chapter thus studies some of its legacies. According to Sandra Laugier, Cavell's work as an ordinary language philosopher testifies to an interest in—and calls for an attentiveness to—the ordinary which is shared by Emerson and by the ethics of care. Moreover, studying Cavell's works is all the more called for, in this investigation into the relevance of care for poetics, that Cavell wrote about the three authors that the other chapters of this study discuss—including about their ideas about poetry. In *In Quest of the Ordinary*, he thus writes:

The direct historical connection (of Emerson with Heidegger) is through Nietzsche, but the intellectual conjunction has been a touchstone for me in the past few years in exploring the idea that romanticism generally is to be understood as in struggle with skepticism, and at the same time in struggle with philosophy's responses to skepticism. (How generally this applies is not yet important. It is indicated by the figures of Coleridge and Wordsworth behind Emerson and Thoreau, and by Hölderlin's shadow in Heidegger.) (*In Quest* 175)

Chapter Four therefore begins with a study of Cavell's idea that Wordsworth, Emerson, and Heidegger's works constitute responses to scepticism in order to determine whether there is an overlap between, on the one hand, the ways in which Cavell describes Romanticism's responses to scepticism, and, on the other hand, my understanding of poetry as a manifestation of care. I argue that Cavell—like Wordsworth, Emerson, and Heidegger—belongs to a line of writers whose works highlight the relevance that the concept of care has for poetics and for the history of ideas. So as to demonstrate that Cavell's views provide further philosophical arguments supporting the idea that poetry manifests care, this chapter draws on Stephen Mulhall's reading of Cavell—notably because Mulhall is also a Heidegger scholar—and on Simon Critchley's views about poetry—since he too has written on both Heidegger and Cavell. My analysis of Cavell's ideas and of his description of anti-sceptical relationships will attempt to show that what is at stake in the latter is an authentically caring way of being that acknowledges, respects, accepts and even welcomes epistemological and ontological uncertainty and openness. Cavell's views, I conclude, further underscore the relevance of the notion that poetry manifests care all the while highlighting its ethical aspects.

This study therefore hopes to complement existing Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian literary criticism discussing the relationship between literature and ethics, such as the works of Derek Attridge, Krzysztof Ziarek, or Michael Eskin. One crucial way in which this investigation differs from the works of those academics, however, is that they tend to discuss poetry, ethics, and Heidegger's ideas, in relation to the works of post-

structuralist French philosophers, particularly Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.<sup>5</sup> I have chosen not to discuss works by the latter, as there would have been no space to do so given that the scope of this investigation is already quite broad within the Anglo-American world. Additional chapters would have been necessary to do justice to the numerous connections that have already been established between, on the one hand, Heidegger's works and, on the other hand, writers, poets or critics in the francophone world with an interest in ethics or Romanticism (such as the poets René Char and Paul Valéry or the critics Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, to name a few). Similarly, this investigation does not discuss the numerous literary and philosophical connections between, on the one hand, the authors I have chosen to study and, on the other hand, the German writers and philosophers that influenced them—such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Immanuel Kant, or Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the scope of this work prevents it from investigating the influence of Judeo-Christian texts and morals on the understandings of poetry and care that I discuss, even though biblical scripture is likely to be one of the origins of those conceptions.<sup>7</sup>

Among the significant limitations of this investigation is also the fact that my claim to partake in academic conversations pertaining to the history of ideas does not extend to discussions of the socio-political and ideological implications of the topics and authors I have chosen to study. I mention this caveat so as to warn Heidegger scholars that I will not

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Krzysztof Ziarek's *Inflected Language: Towards a Hermeneutics of Nearness*, Michael Eskin's *Ethics and Dialogue: In the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam, and Celan*, and Derek Attridge's *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction's Traces, The Work of Literature, or The Singularity of Literature*.

<sup>6</sup> I mention these German authors in particular because Emerson wrote a chapter praising Goethe's work in *Representative Men*, because Wordsworth travelled to Germany and was influenced, including through Coleridge, by Kant and Schelling's ideas, and because Heidegger wrote essays discussing Hölderlin's poetry (as well as Reiner Maria Rilke's and Georg Trakl's).

<sup>7</sup> Among the reasons why such an enquiry would have been worthwhile are the facts that Emerson was a pastor (and the son of a pastor), and that Heidegger had a complex relationship with Catholicism (he briefly entered a Jesuit seminary and studied theology at university before being critical of Christianity). Both Emerson and Heidegger moreover compared poets to priests or prophets. In addition to this, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, Cavell connects issues related to scepticism with the biblical story of the Fall: "The explicit temptation of Eden is to knowledge, which above all means: to a denial that, as we stand, we know. There was hence from the beginning no Eden, no place in which names are immune to scepticism" (*IQO*, 49). I also mention, in Chapter Four, the ideas of Iris Murdoch, an openly Catholic writer and philosopher who contributed to discussions about literature and ethics. The etymological and scriptural connections between the ideas of care, charity, and love (*caritas*), might therefore also have been worth discussing.



discuss the relationship between his ideas on poetry, his elitism, and his nationalism. Likewise, I will not explore the connections between Emerson's poetics, his vision of America, and his democratic ideals, nor will I engage with issues raised by New Historicism about Romanticism, Wordsworth, and the politics of poetic (mis)representations of the ordinary. Lastly and similarly, scholars with an interest in Cavell and the ethics of care will find not find a thorough assessment of the extent to which the idea that poetry manifests care may contribute to feminist studies. I will not enter such debates because, like the points I raised about French, German, and biblical connections, these topics would have required their own separate chapters in order to address the important socio-political and ideological issues they raise. I will nevertheless attempt, in the conclusions of each chapter, both to articulate in more detail some of the questions my work raises in relation to these topics, and to point out the ways in which this theoretical investigation is relevant to researchers interested in these discussions.

The purpose of my work's analyses and arguments demonstrating the relevance of the concept of care for literary theory, its history, and poetics, is threefold. First, by uncovering some of the origins and legacies—the philosophical filiations and affiliations—of the Heideggerian idea that poetry manifests care, this study endeavours to contribute to the study of the history of ideas, and to the history of theories about literature and poetry in particular. Second, this investigation hopes to contribute to the field of literary theory and criticism, particularly poetics, by showing how asking a text whether it contains ideas pertaining to the notion that poetry manifests care, and asking a poem whether it manifests care, uncovers new philosophical aspects within. Third, this exploration seeks to make contributions to Heidegger, Emerson, Wordsworth, and Cavell scholarship, not only by demonstrating the philosophical connections between these authors' ideas, but also by providing new interpretations and ways of reading these authors' works, and by uncovering new relationships between poetry, phenomenology, ontology, and ethics therein.

## Chapter One: Heidegger

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that poetry as Heidegger understands it is a manifestation of what he calls authentic care. So as to make this claim, this investigation begins with an exposition of what Heidegger writes about care in *Being and Time* before turning to some of his later essays, published in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, that discuss poetry. Given the scope of this investigation as a whole and the fact that its primary aim is to demonstrate the pertinence and usefulness the notion that poetry manifests care has for the study of the history of ideas and literary criticism and theory, particularly poetics, this chapter cannot afford to go into an in-depth discuss of all of Heidegger's works. I am aware that Heidegger's ideas evolved in the twenty years or so that separate *Being and Time* from the essays in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, and that several important works, including on the topics of metaphysics, language and truth, stand between his earlier and later works. Even though studying these works might have enabled me to point out better the significant changes that Heidegger's ideas underwent, focusing chiefly on *Being and Time* on the one hand, and on *Poetry, Language, Thought* on the other has proved sufficient for me to put forward, define, and discuss the idea that poetry manifests care. This mean that Heidegger scholars may find that this chapter contributes to discussions about the extent to which Heidegger's ideas underwent more or less of a turn (*Kehre*). Commenting on a passage from *Letter on Humanism* where Heidegger mentions this post-*Being and Time* "turning" in his work, Michael Wheeler for instance writes: "what we should expect from the later philosophy is a pattern of significant discontinuities with *Being and Time*, interpretable from within a basic project and a set of concerns familiar from that earlier text" (par. 3.1). Without erasing the "significant discontinuities" that Wheeler mentions, I must concede that, on the whole, this chapter does highlight more the "basic project" and "set of concerns" that are common to both Heidegger's earlier and later works. The scope of this project as a whole has compelled me to limit this study to a discussion of Heidegger's arguments; I therefore have not analysed the significant stylistic changes his writing underwent, nor how his more poetic way of writing the later essays supports—or undermines—the philosophical ideas put forward therein. In addition to this point, there are two main reasons my claim to contribute to Heidegger scholarship is a humble one. The first is that I have not worked on Heidegger's original German texts but solely on existing

translations; the second is that I have not aimed at producing a definitive, comprehensive, and authoritative explication of *all* of Heidegger's views on poetry and care. Rather, my approach has been that of an exploration of what the translations of some of his works—as well as what their analyses by Heidegger scholars—allow me to argue and do given his concept of care and his ideas about poetry. In this respect, my approach to his work is partly akin to that of a stage director, and just as playwrights and their scholars may disagree with what contemporary stage directors do with plays and how they interpret them, so too do I expect some Heidegger scholars to disagree with my approach—as Heidegger himself may well have. In spite of such limitations, given this chapter's claim that reading some of Heidegger's later essays in light of what he writes about care in *Being and Time* sheds new light on his ideas about both poetry and care, I hope that Heidegger scholars will find this study to be an engaging contribution to discussions within their field. Most importantly, because the aim of this—chiefly exegetical—chapter is to define the theoretical notion that poetry manifests care, my hope is that literature scholars interested in poetics and literary criticism, regardless of their familiarity with Heidegger's work, will find this chapter to provide a stimulating philosophical perspective on poetry. Having defined this understanding of poetry as a manifestation of care, the subsequent chapters of this investigation will then discuss its relevance for the study of literature and for the history of ideas.

## 1. The Fable of the Goddess *Cura* and Ontological Care

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger provides an in-depth explication of how a human being *is*—regardless of where they are, as long as they *are there*, hence Heidegger's use of the word *Dasein*<sup>8</sup>, which usefully makes clear that his work is ontological, not anthropological or metaphysical, while forestalling any thinking in terms of substance, subjectivity, or nature. One of the important conclusions Heidegger arrives at, is that “Dasein's Being reveals itself as *care*” (*Being* 227). In other words, what characterises our Being<sup>9</sup>—what defines the way in which we *are* and cannot not be—comes to light and

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<sup>8</sup> Even though this is a German word, I will not italicise it in the rest of this work in order to be consistent with the fact that it is not italicised in the English translation of *Being and Time* (as well as in several secondary sources) that this investigation quotes from.

<sup>9</sup> I have chosen to capitalise ‘Being’ to signal a reference to essence (what someone or something fundamentally *is*) as opposed to substance, existence, or to ‘a being’ (which refers to an entity). I have not capitalised Being in hyphenated expressions such as ‘being-in-the-world’ or ‘being-there’. My capitalisation of Being by no means presupposes, however, a fixed or permanent nature of such essence. Indeed not only can a thing's Being change, it can be a notion (say, flux) or an activity

becomes intelligible when understood in terms of care. Heidegger illustrates this importance and centrality of care in human beings by quoting an “ancient fable in which Dasein’s interpretation of itself as ‘care’ has been embedded” and in which the deity Care “thoughtfully (...) shaped” a human being out of clay, allowing her to “possess it as long as it lives” (*Being* 242). There are three points I wish to stress about this fable—and, more importantly, about Heidegger’s comments on it.

The first is that Heidegger puts this fable forward to point out that understanding a human being’s Being in terms of care is not a novel idea that originated while writing *Being and Time*, but that it can instead be found to date back at least to the Latin roots of the Western world. This already suggests that an exploration of some of the origins of Heidegger’s ideas on care might be enlightening, particularly in relation to poetry. Indeed—and this is the second point I wish to stress—the fact that Heidegger should draw a parallel between, on the one hand, his own understanding of the concept of care and, on the other hand, a poetic and mythological story in which Care is a goddess, suggests that care and poetry are related.<sup>10</sup> The third and most important point I wish to stress is the fact that Care is said to “possess” humans. This is further explained by Heidegger as follows: the fable “has brought to view in advance the kind of Being which dominates his [Dasein’s] *temporal sojourn in the world*, and does so through and through” as “‘care’ is here seen as that to which human Dasein belongs ‘for its lifetime’” (*Being* 243). The terms of dominating and

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(whatever that thing does); one’s Being can for instance be a way of being or behaving. Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei thus writes, in *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, that according to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, “Being is not a ‘what’ but a ‘how,’” (42) while he argues in later works that “Being is not a ‘what’ but a ‘happening’ (*das Geschehen*), an ‘event’ (*das Ereignis*)” (42). On the question of capitalisation, Michael Wheeler helpfully writes the following in the “Martin Heidegger” entry of *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Many of Heidegger’s translators capitalize the word ‘Being’ (*Sein*) to mark what, in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger will later call the *ontological difference*, the crucial distinction between Being and beings (entities). The question of the meaning of Being is concerned with what it is that makes beings intelligible *as* beings, and whatever that factor (Being) is, it is seemingly not itself simply another being among beings. Unfortunately the capitalization of ‘Being’ also has the disadvantage of suggesting that Being is, as Sheehan (2001) puts it, an ethereal metaphysical something that lies beyond entities, what he calls ‘Big Being’. But to think of Being in this way would be to commit the very mistake that the capitalization is supposed to help us avoid. For while Being is always the Being of some entity, Being is not itself some kind of higher-order being waiting to be discovered. As long as we remain alert to this worry, we can follow the otherwise helpful path of capitalization. (par. 2.2.1)

<sup>10</sup> In Heidegger’s later essays poetry moreover becomes the privileged way of addressing the question of Being and of Dasein’s place in a world from which gods have departed (such as in his essay entitled “What Are Poets For?”). In keeping with the kind of vocabulary Heidegger uses in this essay—in which he makes, as Emerson also does, a parallel between poets and prophets or priests—my argument that poetry manifests care could partly be reframed or reworded as the claim that poets are the voice of the goddess of Care.

belonging, together with the image of humans being clay puppets in the hands of the deity Care for as long as they live, point towards the idea that all human actions are necessarily motivated by care. As Charles E. Scott puts it, Heidegger puts care forward as “the origin and meaning of human life in the world” (“Care” 58). Scott’s term “meaning” moreover suggests that the explanation for human actions and life—the reason a human being *is*—lies in care. In other words, the answer to the question “What is Dasein for?” or “What are human beings (here) for?” would be: care.

Referring to the Latin fable previously mentioned, Scott further explains how it is helpful in order to understand Heidegger’s position that care is central to human life in general:

Heidegger includes this story in *Being and Time* in order to show that awareness of the definitive role of Care in human being is ingrained and pre-theoretical in our historical lineage. . . . This ancient story shows that people’s common way of being bears an intrinsic sense of – a fundamental attunement to – the necessity of both careful responsibility for our lives and world and the inevitability, in living, of loss and misfortune. According to the sense of the story, the form of human being is one of Care; human being is shaped by Care. (“Care” 57-8)

Scott’s first sentence stresses the same first two points that I made earlier about how the centrality of care to the Being of humans is an idea that goes both far back into “our historical lineage” and beyond formal philosophical thinking (given its presence in a “pre-theoretical”, poetic and mythological fable). Scott’s last sentence, mentioning Care’s shaping of humans, is a clear reference to the goddess Care creating humans, but given that it comes after a sentence explaining the meaning of the fable, his words also hint towards an additional interpretation. Is not every human being, for instance in infancy, like a clay puppet in the hands of Care? Care, in this respect, creates the adults that children become: none of us adults would not have survived early childhood without being in the hands of carers, that is to say, in caring hands. Moreover, the various kinds of caring, and the extent of the care, that we receive perhaps also shapes our personalities as well as our own ways of caring for other beings and things. *Being and Time*, however, is not a psychological or sociological investigation, so such an interpretation of the fable’s metaphor does not help explain its presence in Heidegger’s text. I mention this interpretation and this social aspect, because the importance and necessity of the caretaking of infants in any human society is a point stressed by care-ethicists such as Virginia Held. For instance, in her book *The Ethics of Care*, she writes that “without care no child would survive and there would be no persons to respect” (17). The fable’s poetic metaphor of humans being shaped by care can thus be

interpreted in ways that are relevant both to Heidegger's ontological and phenomenological work and to the socio-political work of care-ethicists. This in turn suggests that those different understandings of care overlap and are complementary, which is one of the things this investigation hopes to demonstrate.<sup>11</sup>

Going back to Scott's words above, his central sentence contains three words that are helpful to understand the implications of Heidegger's definition of care: necessity, responsibility and inevitability. We cannot fail to experience care both because we are responsible for so many things (every action that we choose—or care to—do) and because we are unavoidably made aware of the loss of things we want or care about (let alone because of death). In other words, we cannot escape the hands of care because we are not indifferent beings. We constantly make decisions for which we are accountable and we are aware of the consequences of our actions in time; because of our intricate involvement in the world, we are not neutral or objective agents detached from it. In *Heidegger and Being and Time*, Stephen Mulhall usefully explains this idea that we are consequently *subjected to* care:

Cura's shaping of Dasein implies that Dasein is held fast or dominated by care throughout its existence. This signifies not only that care is the basis of its Being, but that this is something to which Dasein is subject – something into which it is thrown, and so something by which it is determined. . . . the fable implies that care is the unifying origin of the various limits that characterize Dasein's distinctive mode of existence. So by invoking this tale, Heidegger emblemizes the conditionedness of human existence – the human condition – as fundamentally a matter of being fated to a self and to a world of other selves and objects about which one cannot choose not to be concerned. (*Heidegger* 112)

Mulhall's last word "concerned" does not so much refer to the idea of worrying about objects or people but rather that, when doing something, we cannot fail to perceive the tools or equipment around us in a way that matters to the task we are carrying out. This is indeed how Heidegger uses the word concern, as shall be explained later on in this chapter. Mulhall thus stresses not only the passivity of Dasein ("held", "dominated", "thrown") and the inevitability of care (Dasein is "determined", "fated"), he also explains that care is to be understood as an underlying and "unifying" concept under which particular activities are subsumed—activities which display manifestations of care such as concern. His words

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<sup>11</sup> Another point, linked to this metaphor, which this investigation will also make in another chapter, has to do with the idea that if we are as in the hands of Care—shaped by this goddess—then we are neither fully conscious nor completely in control of how we care. Thus, if poetry manifests and reveals how we care, it may give us a glimpse into something we neither fully control nor are completely conscious of. My reading of Wordsworth's poem "The Thorn" in Chapter Three illustrates this point.

remind the reader of *Being and Time* that Heidegger's work is a phenomenological one: it focuses on the way we are, not as universal beings in a decontextualized and metaphysical way, but in our day-to-day and concrete existences as people caught up in various activities. Heidegger's work attempts to define the different ways in which we perceive, behave and, in the most general sense, *are*—the “various limits that characterise Dasein's distinctive mode of existence.” Care appears to the German philosopher to be what lies at the core and what fundamentally links and accounts for our ways of being, hence Mulhall's term “unifying origin.”

The notion of care as structurally encompassing various activities, together with the idea that, even towards things, we behave in a way that lies within the sphere of care, are put forward in the following sentences from *Being and Time*:

Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies ‘before’ every factical ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them. . . . When we ascertain something present-at-hand by merely beholding it, this activity has the character of care just as much as does a ‘political action’ or taking a rest and enjoying oneself. (*Being* 238)

Heidegger dismisses the word “object”, preferring the term “present-at-hand”;<sup>12</sup> his sentence therefore essentially means that according to him, we somehow care even when we merely look at something and acknowledge its presence. All our activities and behaviours are said to be characterised by care—they have “the character of care”—in a fundamental way: this core characteristic is present in our Being *prior* to us behaving in manners which might then be defined in one way or another, so that care is there “existentially *a priori*.” This idea of care being an all-encompassing “structural totality” does not make it easy, however, to understand how what we feel—or do not feel—for objects in front of us when we passively “behold” them, has “as much” to do with care as does “a ‘political action’” or “enjoying oneself.” In order to get a better understanding of why, according to Heidegger, all these activities have “just as much” the “character of care”, Mulhall's following words prove helpful:

Dasein is always occupied with the entities it encounters in the world – concerned about ready-to-hand and present-at-hand entities, and solicitous of other human beings. The point is not that Dasein is always caring and concerned, or that failures of sympathy are impossible or to be discouraged; it is rather that, as Being-in-the-world, Dasein must *deal*

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<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Heidegger avoids the term “subject” as the ideas of subjectivity and objectivity fail to acknowledge our unmediated and intricate involvement or embedding within the world—which his hyphenated terms, such as “present-at-hand” or “being-in-the-world,” further highlight.

with that world. The world and everything in it is something that cannot fail to matter to it.  
(Heidegger 111)

Although Mulhall uses quite precise Heideggerian terminology (“concerned about ready-to-hand and present-at-hand entities and solicitous of other human beings”) which I will clarify later on, he also attempts in this passage an explanation in layman’s terms of the overarching concept of care: we are “occupied” with things and people because we “must *deal*” with them. Thus, even when we are merely beholding something and acknowledging its presence, that thing “matters” to us. This simple non-action is a “dealing with” the world—a way of caring—and even people who would decide to close their eyes, shut themselves away from the world, and claim that nothing no longer matters to them, would still display a modality of care, albeit an attempted negative one. To take a concrete example, on my bicycle ride to work, I come cross many things on the streets, and my beholding everything undeniably has the character of care because, just as I worry about whether that reversing lorry can see me, I dismiss the red car parked to its left as an insignificant presence. The careful attention I pay to the lorry, just like the split-second acknowledgment and dismissal of the car, both pertain to care because everything around me matters to me (to my riding a bicycle and not wanting to have an accident).

We therefore cannot be but caring—in Heidegger’s all-encompassing meaning of the word—and that word has to be understood not on the ontical level—of fleeting individual moments or instances that come and go—but on the ontological level—what fundamentally and irrevocably is—as Scott writes:

“Care” on his terms, for example, means the *inevitability* of concern, uncertainty, insecurity, projecting ahead and maintaining all aspects of our human engagements, as well as the desirability of responsibility and dedication. This inevitability for human being indicates the ontological character of the term, Care, as distinct from instances of concern, solicitude and organization. (“Care” 60)

Although the previous example of the bicycle ride helpfully illustrates of the “inevitability” of “concern, uncertainty, insecurity,” it does not make immediately clear why care involves a “desirability of responsibility and dedication.” Yet, what that example shows is that what we pay attention to (such as a lorry) or dismiss as unimportant (such as a parked car) is based on decisions and choices. Whether these decisions and choices are more or less conscious is another issue, and even though it is an important one since the question of one’s responsibility is tied to that of one’s free and conscious decision-making, it is one this investigation cannot afford to address. What Scott suggests, however, is that given



Heidegger's understanding of care as structural totality, it is desirable to be a responsible and dedicated person because carelessness (as opposed to dedication) and indifference to the consequences of our actions (as opposed to responsibility) amounts to a denial of our intrinsically caring nature. In other words, I understand Scott to be arguing that carelessness and irresponsibility are undesirable because these would amount to a failure or a refusal to acknowledge who we fundamentally are. Scott's term "desirability" suggests that although Heidegger's notion of care has an overarching, "ontological character," this view of what human beings fundamentally are implies that some concrete "instances" or ways of caring, on the ontic plane, manifest more than others a responsible living up to that fundamental Being. I will discuss this point in more detail further down below, particularly when studying what Heidegger means by the term authenticity and by the notion of authentic care.

## **2. Manifestations of Ontological Care, Solicitude, and Authentic Care**

Having better grasped, with the help of Scott and Mulhall, the "ontological character" of care as a structural totality, and having established that, as a consequence, poetry is an activity that necessarily subsumed under the notion of care, this investigation can now begin to ask *how* poetry falls within this unifying structure—that is to say, how poetry manifests care. Scott's above words mention "instances of concern, solicitude and organization" and while the latter word does not explicitly refer to a key term in Heidegger's work, the other two do—and Mulhall's previously quoted sentences also referred to them (*Heidegger* 111). Whether poetry pertains more to one or the other of these ways in which care is instantiated therefore needs to be discussed, but before doing so, the precise meaning of these terms needs to be clarified.

Heidegger writes that "Care is always concern and solicitude, even if only privately" (238-239). Using terminology from previous chapters of *Being and Time*, he explains that "because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analyses as *concern*, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as *solicitude*" (237). Although such an explanation may be cryptic to someone not familiar with the earlier chapters of *Being and Time*, what Heidegger's usefully compact sentence means, roughly put, is that "*concern*" refers to the way in which we deal with envioning objects, while "*solicitude*" has to do with how we consider other people. Care is common to both insofar as we are constantly

*preoccupied* with our surroundings. Indeed, Heidegger dismisses the idea that human beings are first and foremost—*a priori*—individual subjects who objectively encounter undefined things which are then subjectively interpreted and related to. Instead, he uses the term “being-in-the-world” to stress the phenomenological view that we are constantly and *a priori* immersed in tasks and relations in an already meaningful and usually familiar environment. Such is the “there” in which we “are” prior to any—*a posteriori*—intellectual moves whereby we might see ourselves as more-or-less detached subjective observers of an objective world. Solicitude and concern, together with care—which all share, in German, the same root *Sorge*—are thus terms that stress this fundamental relatedness and involvement with our surroundings.

Even though it is now clear that those words stand in contrast with any ideas of neutrality, objectivity or detachment, the meanings of “concern” and “solicitude” remain unclear at this stage. In order to get a better understanding of what *concern* implies, Heidegger’s following words prove helpful:

Being-in-the-world is proximally absorbed in the world of concern. This concern is guided by circumspection, which discovers the ready-to-hand and preserves it as thus discovered. Whenever we have something to contribute or perform, circumspection gives us the route for proceeding with it, the means of carrying it out, the right opportunity, the appropriate moment. (*Being* 216)

The first sentence of this short paragraph tells us that when it comes to our proximal being-in-the-world, that is to say, our behaviour towards things that are near or around us, then concern is the kind of care that we manifest. Thus, when we have a task to carry out—“something to contribute or perform” as Heidegger writes in the last sentence—such as when a carpenter wants to wedge a piece of wood into another, or when a poet wants to jot down some verses, we look around us in a specific, intentional way. The way in which we *look around*, which is what circumspection means if one considers the Latin origins of the word, Heidegger explains in the middle sentence: we see and identify the tools or equipment that we need—the ready-to-hand—as such, *as* tools and equipment. For instance, when a carpenter catches a glimpse of their hammer by their side, or the poet their pen, they seize it and perform their task, and the Being of that tool thereby remains this tool-ness or equipment-ness that Heidegger calls ready-to-handness. Circumspection “preserves” this ready-to-handness insofar as the carpenter does not make of their hammer—nor does the poet make of their pen—an object of, says, close scrutiny, let alone of scientific observation. When carrying out a task we thus hardly pay any attention to the

tools we use and we stay focused on the task. When I want to make a dish more salty, for instance, and my eyes run across the kitchen counter, identify it, grab it and then turn it a couple of times over the dish, my behaviour is guided by what Heidegger calls *circumspection*—a kind of utilitarian or task-focused outlook on things that makes sure I do not, for example, start taking a close look at the fine workmanship that went into making the mill. The behaviour itself in which I am absorbed—the kind of care that I then manifest—is what Heidegger calls *concern* because the way in which I—as ‘being there’ in the kitchen—relate to the salt mill while cooking is not neutral: it matters to me just as does every other piece of equipment around me in the kitchen when I want to cook and while doing so. Such is the care that my being-in-the-world usually manifests towards things since my presence in any given place is usually caught up in an activity or task with its web of intentions, needs, and problems to solve.

While this kind of preoccupation, mattering, or care towards things is what Heidegger calls concern, he uses the term solicitude to characterise the way in which we relate to other people, as Graham Harman explains in the following paragraph from *Heidegger Explained*:

If “concern” is what we feel for pieces of equipment, what we feel for other Daseins is called “solicitude.” Solicitude can be either harmful or helpful. The harmful kind leaps in and relieves the other Dasein of its responsibility, and thereby secretly dominates the other. But the other kind of solicitude leaps ahead and restores the other Dasein’s care to it in authentic form for the first time. Although Heidegger does not elaborate with specific examples, this remains a very interesting remark about ethics. (67)

Before discussing the two distinct kinds of solicitude that Harman points out, it is helpful to point out that if a parallel can be drawn with concern, then solicitude (whether of the helpful or harmful kind) is the phenomenological way in which we are with other human beings that happen to be there with us, wherever we are. In other words, just as we are partial to things around us because we are involved in tasks and activities, likewise when we are with other people, our relationships to them are not neutral nor disinterested. As with things surrounding us, any alleged detachment or objectivity regarding people is an *a posteriori* stance. It does not reflect the way in which we are, first and foremost, already there, in-the-world, *a priori* caught up in a web of already significant things and people that matter to us, particularly in relation to the tasks or activities we are involved in.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Wordsworth’s poem “The Thorn,” which I discuss in Chapter Three, also makes this apparent.

Although putting concern and solicitude on the same level and drawing such parallels between the two is consistent with Heidegger writing, as was quoted earlier, that “care is always concern and solicitude,” the latter is above all a term that pertains to ways in which we provide some kind of assistance to other people. I stress this point because, even though “Heidegger does not elaborate with specific examples,” as Harman puts it above, the German philosopher writes about solicitude in sufficient detail in order for it to be difficult to conceive of it in situations other than ones involving some form of help or assistance (understood broadly). Heidegger for instance distinguishes between two kinds of solicitude—Harman calls these “helpful” and “harmful”—and the way Heidegger describes these suggests situations where one is carrying out a task together with someone else, or when one intervenes in someone else’s activities in order to try to help them. I will come back to Harman’s words about the “helpful” kind of solicitude and the “care” that it “restores” in “authentic form,” but before I do so, it will prove helpful to turn to how Heidegger describes the “harmful” solicitude in order to understand how, according to Harman, it “relieves” the other of “responsibility” and “dominates” that person:

The Other is thrown out of his position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely. In such solicitude the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him. This kind of solicitude, which leaps in and takes away ‘care’, is to a large extent determinative for Being with one another, and pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand. (*Being* 158)

In linking this kind of solicitude with “concern with the ready-to-hand”, Heidegger provides us with a clue as to how this behaviour “takes away ‘care’” from the other person who is left “thrown out of his position.” Let us, for instance, imagine that the carpenter previously mentioned is now working in their workshop with an assistant or apprentice to whom they have given a task. Solicitude is bound to characterise the carpenter’s behaviour towards their apprentice since if, or rather when, the former sees the latter struggling with a piece of wood they are trying to wedge into another, there are two ways in which the carpenter might react—but I shall leave the helpful one to later. If the carpenter “leaps in,” pushes the apprentice to the side, grabs their tool and does the job for them instead, then their solicitude has all the characteristics of the harmful, dominating kind. Indeed, the apprentice is disburdened, relieved of their responsibility; they step back and once “the matter has been attended to,” the problem will have been solved and will be “something finished and at his disposal.”

Even if the carpenter thought that by acting in this way the apprentice would learn how to carry out the task successfully in the future, and even if the carpenter acted out of goodwill—say, out of care for both the apprentice and the piece of wood so as to make sure neither got hurt nor damaged—their solicitude remains of the harmful, dominating kind. Indeed, the carpenter has *taken* care of the situation and, in doing so, they have taken *care* out of the hands of the apprentice by removing the latter from the task—as they might have done with an inefficient piece of equipment. The carpenter’s behaviour thus “pertains” more to “concern with the ready-to-hand” because it amounts to behaving towards another person in the way one would behave towards other tools in a workshop. It ignores the fact that the other person, unlike a tool, is able to care and, therefore, is also ultimately capable of attending to themselves and to the situation—provided some advice or guidance is given to achieve better results. In putting the apprentice to the side, leaping in, and doing the job themselves, the carpenter deprives the apprentice of their care and exerts a “domination” over the apprentice—not unlike the kind of control one has over tools—even if the apprentice’s “dependency” or submission is “tacit” due to their subordinate status of learner.

This dominating aspect, together with the fact that such harmful solicitude is, according to Heidegger, “to a large extent determinative for Being with one another,” is moreover “a very interesting remark about ethics” as Harman puts it (67)—and a sombre one too. Whether poetry pertains to the kind of care characterised by solicitude (helpful or harmful) still needs to be discussed, but if care has ethical implications and if poetry is a manifestation care, then the links between poetry and the ethics of various ways of caring will be worth studying. At this stage, however, a better understanding of *helpful* solicitude still needs to be achieved. In his *Heidegger Dictionary*—more specifically, in the entry on “Care, Concern, Solicitude” where he quotes *Being and Time*—Michael Inwood contrasts the “two types of *Fürsorge*” (solicitude) in the following manner:

Inauthentic, ‘dominating’ *Fürsorge* ‘immediately relieves the other of care and in its concern puts itself in the other’s place, leaps in for him’, while authentic, ‘releasing’ *Fürsorge* ‘attentively leaps ahead of the other, in order from there to give him back care, i.e. himself, his very own Dasein, not take it away’. . . . Authenticity favours helping others to stand on their own two feet over reducing them to dependency. (36)

While Harman uses the adjective “harmful”—a strong term emphasising ethical consequences—to characterise the first kind of solicitude, Inwood uses “inauthentic.” Harmful solicitude is inauthentic because, by leaping in and preventing the other from

taking care of something, it fails to acknowledge the other as a genuine, caring Dasein. It throws the other person out of their position (*Being* 158), as if that person were a malfunctioning tool or an object that got in the way of the completion of a task—which is why inauthentic solicitude “pertains for the most part to our concern for the ready-to-hand” (*Being* 158). In doing so, the person manifesting harmful or inauthentic solicitude is oblivious to, or forgetful of, what the other fundamentally *is*: a being whose Being is care. Conversely, “authentic” solicitude does not “take” care away from the other, but gives it back to them. That is to say, by letting the other carry on taking care (of whatever the situation supposes), helpful solicitude acknowledges the other for who they are: a being that cares, which is what Dasein is. Helpful or authentic solicitude thereby lets the other manifest their Being, respecting the latter. Inwood’s sentence about the other standing their ground on their own two feet emphasises this idea of not amputating the other, metaphorically speaking, or of not pushing them out of their rightful place. However, the way in which a “releasing” occurs or why authentic solicitude “leaps ahead” and how it “gives back care” all still call for clarification.

While leaping *in* suggests intervention and taking someone else’s place, leaping *ahead* evokes instead the ideas of prevention and anticipation. How might this manifest itself in the example of the carpenter and their apprentice struggling with two pieces of wood? The carpenter will display authentic or helpful solicitude if they provide advice and guidance without taking the apprentice’s place. That is to say, they might explain, say, what the consequences of hitting at such or such an angle might have, or why the use of this tool rather than that one could be more effective. On the way towards carrying out the task properly, the carpenter would then stand ahead of the apprentice, talking to them from further ahead on the path of experienced and knowledgeable carpentry. They would do so without disburdening the apprentice from their task, without relieving them of their responsibility and depriving them of their care. Instead of taking away the apprentice’s care, the helpfully solicitous carpenter would thereby give it back to them, as Heidegger puts it:

there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not . . . take away his ‘care’ but rather [allows] to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a “*what*” with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it. (*Being* 158-9)

Heidegger's idea of helping the other reach transparency *in* care and become freedom *for* it indicate that owing to the help or assistance received, the other person is able to be autonomous, to act deliberately, with awareness of the options available and of their potential consequences, in other words, with an accepted responsibility for the choices made. The helpfully solicitous carpenter might, for example, advise the apprentice and point out the consequences and responsibilities that come with choosing to take such or such an action on the wood. In doing so, particularly if the apprentice was being negligent or absent-minded, the carpenter will have helped their apprentice become "free" to care better and do their best, by helping them become more "transparent" to themselves—that is to say, by helping them become more fully aware of how they are caring and of how determining that caring is. "This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a '*what*' with which he is concerned" because the carpenter is then attending to the apprentice as a caring being, and is not primarily "concerned" with the "what" of the task and of the object being carved. To take a different example, a politician wanting to improve overall public health would display harmful solicitude if they leapt in and banned red meats. Although this may be effective in improving overall public health, this politician would be taking in their hands each individual adult's task of caring for their own health, relieving them from their responsibilities. This politician would be primarily focused on their goal of achieving better public health, and would be treating each person as a "'*what*' with which he is concerned," that is to say, as a thing or tool related to a public health goal. Conversely, helping the population care after its health by educating it to the consequences and dangers of an excessive consumption of red meats allows individuals to care better for their own health in freedom, responsibility and transparency.<sup>14</sup>

Among the adjectives used by Inwood in his previously quoted description of authentic solicitude is "'releasing,'" which refers to a notion Heidegger also uses in his writings on poetic thinking. In the latter, *Gelassenheit* is usually translated as releasement (or letting-be) and it is a notion that stands in opposition to the kind of framing (*Gestell*)

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<sup>14</sup> Christina Schües's following summary also highlights this notion of freedom: "For Heidegger, dealings with the other are characterized by the notion of *care* which is described in its twofold modification: there is a negative care which takes away the care of the other in order to control him. But there is also a positive side to care, essentially to authentic care, which lets the other be *free for* himself" (351).

that technology operates according to Heidegger.<sup>15</sup> Later on in this investigation, I will discuss Heidegger's later works and his ideas on these points; at this stage I simply wish to point out that this association of helpful solicitude with the idea of releasing suggests that the kind of care that poetry manifests "pertains essentially to authentic care"—just like helpful solicitude. Both share a respect for the Being of whoever or whatever is at stake—letting the latter be and come to the fore, without any forceful intervention, displacing or grasping. A poetic work of art, such as a poem about a tree for instance, does not stop the latter from being what it is; it does not cut, uproot, dissect, dissolve and draw conclusions about the physical and chemical features of the tree in order to have it yield information about what it is (its Being). Unlike the scientific description and definition of a tree, a poem does not close off, circumscribe, or have a limited framing of a tree's Being. That is to say, unlike scientific definitions, poems allow for trees to be, say, goddesses, reincarnated relatives, protectors or confidants. Poetic works of art about trees may thus manifest authentic ways of caring insofar as they acknowledge and respect the ontological wealth that trees, people, or things harbour. Poems thereby also reflect our immersion in a world comprising our web of relations, characterised by care—which are phenomenologically prior to the limited and so-called objective, technological stance that turns any tree into a timber-yielding, photosynthesis-achieving plant among others. In order to further explore the links that poetry has with solicitude and authentic care, it is thus necessary to clarify the ways in which both poetry and care have something fundamental to do with what and how things or people are; that is to say, with their Being.

### **3. Care for Being and Relationships to Language: Idle Talk and Speaking Extensively v. Listening and Keeping Silent**

This investigation has so far shown how Heidegger argues that care is central to our lives, and how the fable of the goddess *Cura* shaping and possessing humans provides a useful poetic metaphor for this centrality. The way in which Heidegger claims that care lies "existentially *a priori*," "'before' every factical 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein" (*Being* 238) whose behaviours are subsumed under care, was then pointed out. Examples of concern (together with the circumspection that goes with it) and solicitude were then

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<sup>15</sup> See *Discourse on Thinking* (particularly "Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking") but also "...Poetically Man Dwells..." in *Poetry, Language, Thought* where Heidegger says of poetry that it "does not consist in a clutching or any other kind of grasping, but rather in a letting come of what has been dealt out" (*Poetry* 222).



explored—given that Heidegger writes that “Care is always concern and solicitude, even if only privately” (*Being* 238-239). Even though concern and solicitude refer to different ways of caring, what is common both is the fact that they reveal how—in the way we behave towards things or beings—we are first and foremost caught up in a web of relationships to those things and beings. Heidegger makes this clear in phenomenological statements such as the following one:

What we ‘first’ hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle. . . . It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to ‘hear’ a ‘pure noise’. The fact that motor-cycles and waggons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already dwells *alongside* what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; it certainly does not dwell proximally alongside ‘sensations’; nor would it first have to give shape to the swirl of sensations to provide the springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a ‘world’.  
(*Being* 207)

Heidegger stresses in this passage that things or beings always already matter to us in one way or another—mostly as “what is ready-to-hand within-the-world.” Thinking of ourselves as detached, objective, scientific observers faced with an input of sensory data is an *a posteriori* move—it is a specific attitude or way in which we chose to deal with things or people, and, as such, it is a way of caring, but one which is not phenomenologically fundamental.

The links between caring and Being have moreover started to become apparent: the ways in which we care vary according to what we consider the Being of other things or people to be. For example, caring as a working carpenter means caring for, looking for, and using a tool such as a hammer in the way of concern, with circumspection ensuring that tools remain considered as tools (instead of being admired for their intrinsic beauty or analysed to determine their date and place of manufacturing). Likewise, caring as a detached scientific observer, such as someone conducting forensic research on a hammer, means caring for, looking for, and using that hammer as something containing objective data to be collected. The former (our way of being—i.e., of caring) is thus determined by the latter (how we consider it the Being of what we are dealing with) and vice versa. This is why Heidegger writes: “Being (not entities) is dependent upon the understanding of Being; that is to say, Reality (not the Real) is dependent upon care” (*Being* 255). That is to say, fundamental reality (Being), is nothing other than what we consider it to be: it is defined by how we relate to it—i.e. it is determined by our care. In his essay “Heidegger, Contingency,

and Pragmatism,” Richard Rorty thus writes: “Being . . . is there only as long as we are here. The relations between it and us are . . . of fragile and tentative codependence” (33).

So as to further understand these links between care and Being, it is useful to bear in mind that according to Heidegger our usual way of caring is characterised by concern: “Being-in-the-world is proximally absorbed in the world of concern” (*Being* 216). Concern, moreover, is governed by circumspection—which defines and considers the things around us based on their relevance to our task or activity: it “discovers the ready-to-hand and preserves it as thus discovered” (*Ibid*). Because this is such a frequent or standard behaviour, however, we have a tendency, Heidegger adds, to transfer this considering-things-as-factual-presence-more-or-less-relevant-to-our-task to almost everything all the time, and we hardly ever consider Being (the Being of something, fundamental reality, or the very concept of Being) in any other way:

the interpretation of Being takes its orientation in the first instance from the Being of entities within-the-world. Thereby the Being of what is proximally ready-to-hand gets passed over, and entities are first conceived as a context of Things (*res*) which are present-at-hand. “*Being*” acquires the meaning of “*Reality*”. Substantiality becomes the basic characteristic of Being. (*Being* 245)

Heidegger is critical, in this passage, of our tendency to reduce or narrow down Being to the point of understanding it only in terms of substance, of *something* that would be there, “present-at-hand.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the fact that the tool-like “Being of what is proximally ready-to-hand gets passed over” is particularly problematic for our ways of considering and relating to other human beings, as the earlier discussion of harmful solicitude contributed to show. It also explains why Heidegger argues that the harmful kind of solicitude “is to a large extent determinative for Being with one another, and pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand” (*Being* 159). The helpful kind of solicitude, by contrast, was shown to acknowledge and respect the Being of the other as a caring person instead of

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<sup>16</sup> This passage is, above all, about Being in the broadest sense (not “the Being of entities within-the-world”), and I realise that Heidegger is not so much critical of our relationships to other people as he is of our (non)relation to—and of our forgetfulness of—Being as such. However, the scope of my work prevents it from going into an in-depth discussion of the latter relationship, as this investigation primarily discusses Heidegger’s phenomenological ideas about how we relate to things, people, and the world, notably in relation to poetry and, ultimately, to care-ethics. Discussing Heidegger’s ideas about how we care for Being in the broadest sense would require looking at his ideas, developed in his later works, about the poet as custodian of Being who “utters the holy” (*Poetry* 92) and this would take this investigation towards themes discussed by theologians and Heidegger scholars based in divinity schools.

closing off that Being and treating that person solely like an object standing there (present-at-hand) or like a tool (ready-to-hand) more or less relevant to our task or goal.

Heidegger's discussion about how we come to consider the Being of someone or something moreover include the ideas that "[j]ust as *circumspection* belongs to concern as a way of discovering what is ready-to-hand, solicitude is guided by *considerateness* and *forbearance*" (*Being* 159). As the equivalent of circumspection for concern, considerateness and forbearance discover the other as caring person and ensure they are not reduced to mere a mere factual and indifferent presence.<sup>17</sup> This considerate, forbearing and respectful preservation of the other as such explains why, in his characterisation of helpful solicitude, Heidegger writes, as quoted earlier, that "this kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other" (*Being* 159). The fact that the existence of the other is not reduced to factual and indifferent presence means that their Being is acknowledged and respected, and that is why the form of care displayed can be considered authentic. Authentic care therefore respects and preserves Being in all its potential, that is to say, without reducing it to simple factual presence as entity, substance or thing.

What remains unclear, however, is what determines or explains that one person is able to display authentic rather than inauthentic care—such as helpful rather than harmful solicitude. Heidegger does not provide a clear answer to this question, but what he writes about hearing and listening suggests that it has to do with being careful, attentive, respectful and receptive: "Listening to . . . is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others. Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (*Being* 206). The passive and receptive act of hearing, like the attentive and respectful one of listening, imply a letting-be that does not hinder nor interrupt whatever or whoever is being heard or listened to. The idea of openness is moreover mentioned twice in this passage as part of what listening and hearing imply and in relation to Being—both regarding other people ("Being-open as Being-with for Others") and oneself ("Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being"). This idea of openness stands in contrast with the previously mentioned noption of a framing or

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<sup>17</sup> In *Entre Nous* and other works, Emmanuel Levinas will take up Heidegger's intuitions on such points so as to argue that seeing the face of another human being triggers a considerate and forbearing acknowledgment of the other that is phenomenologically prior to any detached view that might then discern objective facts about the height/colour/gender of the person one beholds.

a closing-off of Being, including as *Gestell*, itself opposed to the releasement and letting-be of *Gelassenheit*. This passage therefore suggests that listening and hearing imply an acknowledgement and a respect of ontological wealth and potential, which are characteristic of authentic care. Because this passage comes from a section of *Being and Time* devoted to language, it is worth investigating whether further parallels can be drawn between, on the one hand, Heidegger's description of authentic or inauthentic care and, on the other hand, his characterisation of authentic or inauthentic relationships to language, including hearing and listening. This investigation will then be better able to ask whether poetry pertains to an authentic relationship to language and to authentic care as such.

Heidegger's remarks about keeping silent are further evidence that attentiveness and letting-be—which listening implies—are characteristics of authentically caring relationships:

In talking with one another, the person who keeps silent can 'make one understand' (that is, he can develop an understanding), and he can do so more authentically than the person who is never short of words. . . . Keeping silent authentically is possible only in genuine discoursing. To be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say—that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself. (*Being* 208)

When I am attentive to what the other is saying by listening silently—as opposed to when I am merely waiting for my turn to speak instead of focussing on what the other is trying to tell me—a “genuine discourse” becomes possible and an “authentic” understanding can take place, Heidegger argues. Just as when helpful solicitude is displayed, essence or Being is thus respected and not distorted nor usurped—that of the person as far as helpful solicitude is concerned or that of their speech in the case of keeping silent and listening. Deliberately listening and keeping silent imply being considerate and forbearing—words that define what guides solicitude—as opposed to exerting domination or stepping (or leaping) in—which are terms Heidegger uses to describe harmful solicitude (*Being* 158). Moreover, through keeping silent and manifesting reticence to speak, a “Being-with-one-another which is transparent” (*Being* 208) becomes possible, Heidegger writes, and transparency is also achieved through helpful solicitude (*Being* 159). In both cases, there is an unhindered, transparent letting-be, a respectful attentiveness to the Being of the other and of their words or speech. Listening silently therefore pertains to authentic care, just like helpful solicitude. The idea that attentive respect for Being is characteristic of various behaviours that pertain to authentic care such as helpful solicitude or silently listening comes to light even more clearly if one considers the behaviours that Heidegger describes

as their opposites. One such behaviour, harmful solicitude, has already been discussed, and the ways in which it is inauthentic—how it does not respect the Being of the other—has already been explained. After focussing on keeping silent, looking at what lies at the opposite end of the spectrum of listening therefore calls for attention. Such an exploration of inauthenticity in communication will be a way of gradually closing down on the relationships between uses of language, Being, and ways of caring—so as then to be able to define the place and role poetry in relation to these.

In the paragraph where he writes about keeping silent, Heidegger contrasts that type of listening to extensive talking: “Speaking at length about something does not offer the slightest guarantee that thereby understanding is advanced. On the contrary, talking extensively about something covers it up” (*Being* 208). Thus, whereas keeping silent means paying a respectful attention to a speaker and their words, speaking at length is characterised by a careless use of the latter. A form of inauthentic care then manifests itself not only towards words and their meaning, which is taken for granted, but also towards the Being of whatever is discussed since extensive talking “covers it up.” Such disrespect and carelessness—or inauthentic care—is also manifested towards the person the words are spoken to, insofar as the speaker is presuming an obvious understanding. That is to say, the listener is prevented from being able to pay careful attention to the exact meaning of what has been just said or to interrogate it because every utterance is immediately replaced by a new one in a constant covering up. Only a consensual and superficial understanding occurs—as opposed, say, to a poetic attentiveness to the wealth of possible meanings, interpretations, connotations, or implications of what is said. Heidegger thus writes: “what the talk is about is understood only approximately and superficially. We have *the same thing* in view, because it is in *the same* averageness that we have a common understanding of what is said” (*Being* 212). The approximation and superficiality Heidegger mentions, together with that of averageness, suggest inauthentic care, that is to say, carelessness towards the fundamental essence or Being of what is discussed and towards the genuine meaning of what is said.

In order to understand further the notions of averageness and sameness, and why Heidegger is critical of them, it is helpful to note that the superficiality that occurs when speaking extensively also characterises mundane conversations in which both interlocutors are careless towards meaning. Indeed, as Charles E. Scott points out, “[t]he ordinary

chitchat of group-talk is one example of what Heidegger calls inauthentic existence. We all know what we mean, and we stay on the surface of things" ("Care" 59). If a covering up is responsible for superficiality in talking extensively, what occurs in what Scott describes—and which Heidegger refers to as "idle talk" (*Being* 211)—is a mutual contentment with superficiality, sameness, and averageness. Heidegger thus writes: "Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up; it . . . releases one from the task of genuinely understanding" (*Being* 213). This idea of a releasement from a task is also characteristic of inauthentic solicitude: the victim, so to speak, of harmful solicitude is able to "disburden [herself or] himself" (*Being* 158) of the task of caring because the harmfully solicitous person has leapt in and thrown them out of their position. Moreover, just as there is a "domination" (*Being* 158) at play in harmful solicitude, there is in idle talk a kind of "dominance" that likewise "prescribes" and "determines," as Heidegger writes: "The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world 'matter' to it. The 'they' prescribes one's state-of-mind, and determines what and how one 'sees'" (*Being* 213). The "they" that Heidegger refers to conveys "the public way in which things have been interpreted" and is characterised by the aforementioned notion of averageness. It is perceptible in expressions such as 'you know what I mean' and implies making assumptions about indistinct meanings by summoning notions of common sense or public opinion. If Heidegger uses a vocabulary of "dominance," and prescription, it is because these common or average meanings—characterised by superficiality, assumptions, and lack of clarity or distinction—are disrespectful, as in the case of harmful solicitude, of Dasein's ability to care for—to understand or interpret—whatever is being said and discussed. As Heidegger puts it: "Things are so because one says so. Idle talk is constituted by just such gossiping and passing the word along—a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness" (*Being* 212). As in the case of harmful solicitude, the initial situation presents a challenge: in the case of idle talk there is the difficulty of achieving genuine understanding, and in the case of solicitude, there is the initial struggle that prompts the solicitous reaction to help the other person. In both cases this challenging situation is then "aggravated" because instead of an overcoming of the challenge through application, attentiveness, and authentic care, which would be respectful of Dasein's caring ability and potential, what occurs is a disburdening, a deprivation of the task and responsibility of genuinely caring. This occurs when the other person—or the 'they'—exerts

its dominance and attends carelessly to the situation.<sup>18</sup> The following passage, which mentions the idea of not doing something—of leaving it “undone”—further indicates that idle talk pertains to an inauthentic form of care:

The fact that something has been said groundlessly, and then gets passed along in further retelling, amounts to perverting the act of disclosing into an act of closing off. For what is said is always understood proximally as ‘saying’ something—that is, an uncovering something. Thus, by its very nature, idle talk is a closing-off, since going back to the ground of what is talked about is something which it *leaves undone*. (*Being* 213)

Heidegger here makes use of metaphors involving the notion of visibility—of uncovering as opposed to covering over, and of disclosing as opposed to closing off—as in previously quoted passages discussing behaviours pertaining to authentic or inauthentic care.

Moreover, he explains that failure at “disclosing” or “uncovering something” is, or “amounts to,” a failure to attend to what is fundamental—in this case the foundation or “*ground* of what is talked about” (my emphasis). Given that authentic care involves an attentive respect for the Being or essence of whatever is at stake through a letting-be that does not close it off, relationships to language that imply a converse, careless, covering up of what is fundamentally discussed or meant—such as idle talk or talking extensively—pertain to *inauthentic* care.

#### **4. Poetic Discourse and Authenticity**

Having made clear that listening and keeping silent pertain to authentically caring relationships to language, to what kind of care does the relationship to language involved in poetry consequently pertain? Does Heidegger consider poetry to have more the characteristics of talking extensively and idle talk, or those of listening and keeping silent? Heidegger writes that “In ‘poetical’ discourse, the communication of the existential possibilities of one’s state-of-mind can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a

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<sup>18</sup> There is also a parallel on a linguistic level between, on the one hand, the idea of taking the other person’s stance through a leaping in that throws them out of their position (characteristic of harmful solicitude), and, on the other hand, Heidegger’s idea of a “groundlessness” and a “lack of grounds to stand on” in idle talk (*Being* 212). Indeed, in German as in English, the verb ‘to understand’ (*verstehen*) comprises the root verb ‘to stand’ (*stehen*). One moreover speaks of *solid* arguments having strong *foundations*, of them being *grounded* as opposed to them being superficial, *unfounded*, or ‘up in the air.’ The ability for an argument to *stand* thus depends on whether its author has carefully attended to or engaged with the meaning or essence of what they are saying. In other words, idle talk, superficiality, groundlessness and lack of ground or *understanding* is due to a lack of careful attention, i.e., authentic care, since the latter is characterised by attentive respect for Being.

disclosing of existence” (*Being* 205). Even before further analysing this sentence, the fact Heidegger associates poetical discourse with “disclosing of existence” and with “existential possibilities” suggests that poetry pertains to an authentically caring relationship to language—as opposed to ones that narrow down, frame, cover up or close-off. So as to further understand what is at stake in poetry according to Heidegger, it is necessary to clarify what he means, in the above sentence, by “the existential possibilities of one’s state-of-mind,” especially since he also mentions “one’s state-of-mind” in a previously quoted passage, arguing that the “‘they’ prescribes” it (*Being* 213).

At any given point in time, each Dasein, according to Heidegger, is characterised by its specific way of being-in-the-world, as well as by a mood that determines the flavour, so to speak, of its being there. That is to say, how we see our being-whenever-it-is-that-we-are and what we can do there (our “existential possibilities”) depends on how we feel and live our condition, on our “state-of-mind,” which comprises our mood.<sup>19</sup> Anxiety, for instance, may characterise how we feel as being-in-the-world (our condition). Without going into an in-depth analysis of this complex aspect of *Being and Time*, what Heidegger says above about poetical discourse is that it brings to light Dasein’s condition as being-in-the-world (it achieves a “disclosing of existence”) by communicating what our being-there allows and entails (“existential possibilities”) from the point of view of our own mood and perception of our being-in-the-world, i.e., how we find-ourselves-to-be (“one’s state of mind”). Essentially and most importantly, Heidegger’s point is that an understanding of how we

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Wheeler provides a more detailed explanation and discussion of “mood” and “state-of-mind” in the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Heidegger. In the paragraph entitled “Care,” he writes:

As Dasein, I ineluctably find myself in a world that matters to me in some way or another. This is what Heidegger calls *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*), a having-been-thrown into the world. ‘Disposedness’ is Kiesel’s (2002) translation of *Befindlichkeit*, a term rendered somewhat infelicitously by Macquarrie and Robinson as ‘state-of-mind’. Disposedness is the receptiveness (the just finding things mattering to one) of Dasein, which explains why Richardson (1963) renders *Befindlichkeit* as ‘already-having-found-oneself-there-ness’. To make things less abstract, we can note that disposedness is the a priori transcendental condition for, and thus shows up pre-ontologically in, the everyday phenomenon of *mood* (*Stimmung*). According to Heidegger’s analysis, I am always in some mood or other. Thus say I’m depressed, such that the world opens up (is disclosed) to me as a sombre and gloomy place. I might be able to shift myself out of that mood, but only to enter a different one, say euphoria or lethargy, a mood that will open up the world to me in a different way. As one might expect, Heidegger argues that moods are not inner subjective colourings laid over an objectively given world (which at root is why ‘state-of-mind’ is a potentially misleading translation of *Befindlichkeit*, given that this term names the underlying a priori condition for moods). For Heidegger, moods (and disposedness) are aspects of what it means to be in a world at all, not subjective additions to that in-ness. (par. 2.2.7)



fundamentally *are* is communicated in poetical discourse—or rather, this *may* be communicated, given Heidegger’s cautious “can become an aim in itself.”<sup>20</sup> The fact that such “a disclosing of existence” can occur through poetry and other forms of poetic expression (“poetical discourse”) means that poetry is characterised by a transparency towards our fundamental being-in-the-world—since it is able to reflect and convey how we *are*—and it is thereby respectful of our Being as Dasein. This respect and transparency towards Being as well as the ability to communicate accurately on an existential and therefore fundamental—not superficial—level, means that poetical discourse pertains to authentic care much in the same way as keeping silent.<sup>21</sup> A transparent, respectfully attentive relationship to Being (Dasein’s) characterises not only poetical discourse and keeping silent, but also, as was previously show, helpful solicitude. All three pertain to authentic care while idle talk, speaking extensively and harmful solicitude pertain to inauthentic care since domination, usurpation and lack of transparency characterise all three.

Although the link between poetic discourse and authentic care is beginning to become clearer, this connection needs to be investigated further so as to explain *how* the former manifests the latter. However, as much as Heidegger writes about care in *Being and Time*, he writes very little, in this work, about poetic discourse or poetry. In his later essays, it is much the opposite: poetry becomes a prevalent and over-arching concept while Heidegger hardly discusses care any longer. So as to reach a better understanding of the philosophical relation between poetry and care it is therefore necessary not only to turn to his later works, but also to clarify what both care and poetry have to do with a topic which is prevalent both in *Being and Time* and his later essays: our relationships to Being. Indeed, as Michael Wheeler writes in his entry on Heidegger in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “At root Heidegger’s later philosophy shares the deep concerns of *Being and Time*, in that it is driven by the same preoccupation with Being and our relationship with it that propelled the earlier work. In a fundamental sense, then, the question of Being remains *the question*” (par. 3.1). Central to Heidegger’s characterisation of various relationships to Being in *Being and Time* are the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity.

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<sup>20</sup> This is what Wordsworth aims for and achieves in his poem “The Thorn,” as Chapter Three of this study explains.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger for instance writes, as was previously discussed, that “[t]o be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say—that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself” (*Being* 208).

This investigation now needs to discuss these concepts, especially since Heidegger's aforementioned comments on poetical discourse are made not only in the context of descriptions of ways of communicating and of relating to language, but also as part of an even broader characterisation of authenticity and inauthenticity.

Inauthenticity characterises, according to Heidegger, the way in which we *are* "for the most part":

"Inauthenticity" does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world—the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein-with of Others in the "they". Not-Being-its-self [Das Nicht-es-selbst-sein] functions as a *positive* possibility of that entity which, in its essential concern, is absorbed in a world. This kind of *not-Being* has to be conceived as that kind of Being which is closest to Dasein and in which Dasein maintains itself for the most part. (*Being* 220)

Our Being—what and how we *are*—is most of the time characterised by a "kind of *not-Being*," Heidegger writes above, because in our everyday behaviours we fail to display the attentive respect for Being which pertains to the authentic care. Instead, we fall prey to the "they," to idle talk, and to what Heidegger calls curiosity and ambiguity: "Idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterize the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is its 'there'" (*Being* 219). Without going into the details of what curiosity and ambiguity refer to,<sup>22</sup> Heidegger's words make it clear that, along with idle talk, these pertain to inauthenticity and characterise how we *are* on a usual, daily basis. All three share a core feature that make them "definite existential characteristics" of Dasein that "help to make up its Being" (*Being* 219) and that feature is a form of carelessness—the opposite of authentic care. Because, fundamentally, we are caring beings—"Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care" (*Being* 322)—we can be defined in terms of not-Being, in a fundamental or authentic way, when we are care/less. This carelessness manifests itself as harmful solicitude or idle talk, for instance, since it is displayed when we do not pay careful attention to the Being of whatever is at stake—including what we are talking about, or the meaning of what we are saying.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Wheeler provides the following useful short summarising definitions of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity in his paragraph on Care: "*idle talk* (roughly, conversing in a critically unexamined and unexamining way about facts and information while failing to use language to reveal their relevance), *curiosity* (a search for novelty and endless stimulation rather than belonging or dwelling), and *ambiguity* (a loss of any sensitivity to the distinction between genuine understanding and superficial chatter)" (par. 2.2.7).

Our lack of authentic care, i.e. our carelessness or inauthenticity in the ways in which we relate to things and words, is notably due, as was previously discussed, to our constant passing over of “the Being of what is proximally ready-to-hand” (*Being* 245). This means that we fail to realise or to respect the fact that there are other kinds of Beings that need to be cared for differently—a failure that occurs when we manifest harmful solicitude since we then behave towards someone with what Heidegger calls concern, as if that Dasein were more a tool than a human being. As was previously shown, Heidegger uses metaphors of obscurity, of covering up and domination to describe this carelessness towards Being that characterises inauthentic behaviours. Michael Wheeler likewise uses these metaphors in his paragraph on care: he writes that a “world-obscuring process” is at play in behaviours such as idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity as all involve “a closing off or covering up of the world” (par. 2.2.7). What Wheeler points towards in his use of the term “world” is that the very way in which we see the world—what the things or people in it *are* according to us—is determined by the way in which we behave, i.e. by how we care for it, for the people in it, for words and their meanings, and so on.

While the carelessness characteristic of inauthenticity operates a closure and an obscuring disrespect of the Being of whatever is at stake, conversely, the careful respect characteristic of authenticity lets that Being come to the fore and disclose itself without any domination or imposition. As Scott writes, “Authentic people renounce overwhelming instrumentalism, and they practise a certain reticence and careful respect before other beings: they let beings show themselves in their own events. Authenticity means that people check their impulses to control and define their worlds by invasive actions” (“Care” 65). Scott’s terms “let beings show themselves” are similar to the metaphors of transparency and disclosure that Heidegger uses to describe the attentive respect displayed in helpful solicitude and in keeping silent. Likewise, his term “reticence” and the notion that “people check their impulses to control” refer to the domination and carelessness characteristic of the ‘they’ or of someone manifesting harmful solicitude. Scott adds that “authentic people care for the Care of others” (“Care” 65), and even though his words are a comment on the authenticity displayed in helpful solicitude, his words point towards the fact that people are being authentic when they care for Being. That is to say, they are authentic because they respectfully care for what is fundamental—Being—as opposed to negligently care for what is superficial. Given that Heidegger states that “Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care” (*Being* 322), in caring “for the Care of others,” as Scott puts it, one

cares for their Being. Since care for Being characterises authenticity, Scott uses the term “authentic people” but this term is problematic insofar as it can lead one to think that there are two kinds of people—the “authentic” ones as opposed to the inauthentic ones—when in fact a person can be at certain times authentic and, at others, inauthentic. Because a person is (a) Dasein—literally *being there*—her essence or Being is nothing other than the way in which they *are there*, wherever it is that they are at that moment. That is to say, the human being’s Being is care but that care is never abstract, it is always concretely manifested—as, say, concern or solicitude—and is either authentic or inauthentic, depending on circumstances. There are therefore only authentic people insofar as they are being authentic, i.e., caring authentically, at that moment.

Having made clear that authenticity is fundamentally synonymous with attentive and respectful care for Being, and having established that Heidegger describes poetical discourse in a way that suggests it has the potential to pertain to authenticity, how does poetry’s use of language manifest authentic care towards Being? Does poetry “let beings show themselves in their own events”—to use Scott’s above words about what “authentic people” do—and if so, how does poetry achieve this through words? What could poetic discourse do with words that would enable it to pertain more to authentic relationships to language such as keeping silent or listening rather than to inauthentic ones such as idle talk and speaking extensively? So as to begin answering those questions, the following words from Michael Inwood’s chapter on “Language, Truth, and Care” prove helpful as they explain why Being and language are fundamentally linked: “Words and the entities they apply to are not two disparate realms: words essentially refer to entities and, conversely, entities are essentially meaning-laden and thus give rise to words” (Heidegger 41). That is to say, just as, according to Heidegger, we do not hear pure sound but already and first and foremost a motor-cycle or a creaking waggon (*Being* 207), likewise, words and the entities they refer to are first and foremost part of a meaningful network of relations that make up our being-in-the-world. “Words and their meanings are already world-laden,” Inwood thus continues (Heidegger 43). The word ‘cow,’ for example, just like the entity it refers to, is meaning-laden differently according to each person’s world: for some people it may refer to an animal slaughtered for its meat, for others it may refer to the incarnation of a divinity or to a being which is taboo and whose life should not be taken. One may be tempted to think that such worlds come *a posteriori*, on top of the word and of the entity, yet it is the opposite. For instance, just as for someone who knows the sound of a motor-cycle,

perceiving its noise without immediately identifying it as that of a motor-cycle (i.e., considering it, say, as sensory data) can only be an *a posteriori* move that “requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind” (*Being* 207), so too is it only possible to consider *a posteriori* words and the entities they refer to outside of the networks of relations in which they make sense.<sup>23</sup> The implication of this is not only that paying careful attention how words are used reveals how the person using them cares, as previously shown when discussing how idle talk and speaking extensively pertain to inauthenticity. It means that a discourse that would pay careful attention to words by listening to them would acknowledge the world that gives them their meaning—instead of being forgetful of it, of taking it for granted, or of attempting to detach the word and the being it refers to from that world. According to Heidegger, poetry constitutes precisely such a discourse that listens to words and that respects the Beings of the things words refer to by disclosing the world that gives them meaning. Gerald Bruns thus writes, in *Heidegger’s Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings*, that “poetry is closer to listening than to speaking” (24). Before turning to how Heidegger asserts this in his later works that discuss poetry, it is worth studying and clarifying his argument in *Being and Time* about how discourses and behaviours that, unlike to poetry, attempt to detach words and beings from the worlds they are a part of, pertain to inauthentic forms of care that disrespect the Beings of things.

## 5. Objectifying Discourse and Poetry’s “Logic of the Heart”

The problem with discourses and behaviours that attempt to extract or detach a thing from the world in which it makes sense is twofold. First, and as discussed above, such stances do not reflect our *a priori* phenomenological being-in-the-world. Second, they

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<sup>23</sup> As with the sound of the motor-cycle, this is true of words that are already known to the person who hears them. However, just as a person who has never heard a motor-cycle but who has heard other internal combustion engines (say, those of cars or buses) will probably identify it as the sound of that kind of engine (albeit of a kind they are not familiar with), likewise, a person who hears a new word will probably be able to identify whether it is a word spoken in a foreign language or just a word they do not know in their own language. Moreover, as Heidegger writes, “Even in cases where the speech is indistinct or in a foreign language, what we proximally hear is *unintelligible* words, and not a multiplicity of tone-data” (*Being* 207). That is to say, we immediately recognise words as words, as opposed to “tone-data,” even, if we do not understand anything. Heidegger’s stress on “unintelligible” further draws attention to the fact that it is this unintelligibility that points to our *a priori* immersion in meaning and interpretation. This is also why he writes that “Dasein hears, because he understands” (*Being* 206), which means that the sounds we hear make sense to us *a priori*, immediately, and hearing them just as sounds is something that is possible as an *a posteriori* detachment from that understanding.

substantialise and objectify things; that is to say, they attempt to turn things into present-at-hand objects detached from worlds—which these stances describe as subjective. This investigation already discussed our tendency to substantialise, that is to say, how “[s]ubstantiality becomes the basic characteristic of Being” (*Being* 245). What was then pointed out was the problematic nature of this tendency with respect to people, and how the fact that “the Being of what is proximally ready-to-hand gets passed over, and entities are first conceived as a context of Things (*res*) which are present-at-hand” (*Being* 245) accounts for harmful solicitude’s concernful and disrespectful relationship to another person’s Being. However, this tendency is problematic for and disrespectful of the Being not only of people, but of Being as such, including of the Being of a thing, according to Heidegger. He thus criticises “the unexpressed but ontologically dogmatic guiding thesis that what *is* . . . must be *present-at-hand*, and that what does not let itself be Objectively demonstrated as *present-at-hand*, just *is not* at all” (*Being* 320). What Heidegger means is that we only tend to grant existence to substance, to what we consider as objects with a presence that has been objectively demonstrated. To explain the problem what this poses with respect to Being, Heidegger, in that same paragraph, uses the example of what we mean by, and refer to, with the word God. Given our tendency to objectify or substantialise, we are likely to understand God as something pertaining to the realm of the present-at-hand—of substances, entities, or objects that we might be able to encounter and behold. This tendency becomes an “ontologically dogmatic guiding thesis” (*Being* 320) when, with scientific rigour, we require an objective demonstration of present-at-handness in order to grant something, such as God, existence, substance, and Being—all of which, in such a stance, tend to be conflated. For instance, scientifically speaking, something (such as a sub-atomic particle) “*is not*” (*Being* 320) as long as observations, calculations and reproducible experimentation have not demonstrated its existence as something encounterable—usually as a substance. Thus, to say that God “*is not*,” such as when one says that God does not exist, reflects and reveals a network of meaning, or world, where Being is defined as substance and where the “Objectively demonstrated” (*Being* 320) presence of that substance determines its existence. Such a stance an understanding of God fails to consider—or care for—other ways in which God might *be*. That is to say, what follows from it is an indifference to Being, and in this case, to the Being of what the word God refers to. Such indifference or carelessness towards the Being of something is characteristic of inauthentically caring everyday relationships not only to language—such as

idle talk or speaking extensively, as was previously discussed—but also of everyday relationships to people. When writing about different kinds of solicitude, Heidegger thus describes in the following terms our ways of considering—or caring for—the Being of other people when we walk past them: “passing one another by, not ‘mattering’ to one another – these are possible ways of solicitude. And it is precisely these last-named deficient and Indifferent modes that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another” (*Being* 158). Our “everyday” tendencies, behaviours, and ways of speaking—including because of the ‘they,’ curiosity, ambiguity, and our tendencies to substantialise and objectify—are thus characterised by inauthentic care, that is to say, by a “deficient,” careless inattentiveness to Being.

Conversely, if “authentic people” are to “let beings show themselves in their own events” as Scott was previously quoted saying, then not only will they *not* use words with indifference and superficiality, their respectful and attentive care for Being should additionally lead them to avoid and even challenge our tendency to understand Being as substance as well as any objectifying “ontologically dogmatic guiding thesis” (*Being* 320). That is to say, authentic care should be perceptible and reflected in one’s use of words, i.e., it should manifest itself in discourse. Moreover, according to Heidegger, changing our relationships to language—using words differently than we do in idle talk or when we speak extensively—changes our relationships things, to their Being. In his later essay “What Are Poets For?” he thus writes: “all beings, each in its own way, are *qua* beings in the precinct of language. This is why the return from the realm of objects and their representation into the innermost region of the heart’s space can be accomplished, if anywhere, *only in this precinct*” (*Poetry* 129-130). How can this “return”—or “the rescue of things from mere objectness” (*Poetry* 127), as Heidegger also describes it—take place in the “*precinct*” of language, and what is the “innermost region of the heart’s space” into which a “representation” of things needs to be accomplished through language? As these terms are not used in *Being and Time*, answering such questions in more detail, and clarifying what Heidegger means, requires studying more closely “What Are Poets For?” as well as some of the other essays in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Even before doing so, however, the notion of “the heart’s space” suggests two key characteristics. First, interiority, emphasised by Heidegger’s terms “innermost region,” which stands in contrast to the exteriority of things considered as objects, detached from a perceiving subject. Second, emotions and feelings

associated with *love*, a term that calls to mind care—of the attentive, not harmful or indifferent kind—and one Heidegger also uses:

At nearly the same time as Descartes, Pascal discovers the logic of the heart as over against the logic of calculating reason. The inner and invisible domain of the heart is not only more inward than the interior that belongs to calculating representation, and therefore more invisible; it also extends further than does the realm of merely producible objects. Only in the invisible innermost of the heart is man inclined towards what there is for him to love: the forefathers, the dead, the children, those who are to come. (*Poetry* 125)

With these words, and particularly by pointing out how “only in the invisible innermost of the heart is man inclined towards what there is for him to love,” Heidegger suggests that what is considered objectively is objectified, and cannot properly be cared for. Indeed, objectivity and the detachment of “the logic of calculating reason”—that considers things as objects distinct from subjects—are not how we relate to and care for the people we love. Moreover, when one is “inclined towards” something, it means that one has a *penchant* for it, that one’s emotional preference or feelings make one lean more towards it and care for it. The two kinds of logic that Heidegger contrasts are both ways of caring, that is to say, ways in which things matter to us, but while one is characteristic of behaviours manifested towards things that are counted and observed with detachment, the other is characteristic of behaviours and inclinations manifested towards “what there is . . . to love” and to genuinely, attentively care for.

A parallel can thus be drawn between, on the one hand, “the logic of calculating reason” and the “*inconsiderateness* or the *perfunctoriness*” of “deficient and Indifferent modes” of solicitude presented in *Being and Time* (*Being* 159) and, on the other hand, between “the logic of the heart” and the authentic solicitude that is guided by genuine considerateness and forbearance. In drawing this parallel, I do not mean to jump to the conclusion that the logic of reason pertains to inauthenticity while the logic of the heart pertains to authentic care—this still needs to be assessed. What this symmetry between statements made about the ways in which things matter to us does suggest, however, is that there is a continuity in Heidegger’s thinking about care, even though that word is absent from the above sentences. Moreover, another parallel and continuity is apparent in what Heidegger writes about *logos*, discourse, and assertion. Thus, in “What Are Poets For?” Heidegger writes that “reason established a special system of rules for its saying, for the *logos* as declarative prediction; the logic of reason is itself the organization of the dominion of purposeful self-assertion in the objective” (*Poetry* 130), while a similar



statement in *Being and Time* about “The Greeks” reads: “λόγος [logos] came into their philosophical ken primarily as assertion” and “the ‘logic’ of this *logos* (...) was based upon the ontology of the present-at-hand” (*Being* 209). In both works, Heidegger explicitly links a kind of logic—having to do with “the objective” or “the present-at-hand”—and an understanding of discourse, *logos*, as affirmation—“declaration” or “assertion.” His statements corroborate the connections pointed out earlier between relationships to words and relationships to things and their Beings, as well as about tendencies to relate to things as objects and to assert existence as present-at-handness. “Discourse as assertion” (*Being* 209), which is the way we tend to think of language, as Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, and the logic—of reason—that goes with such a *logos*, is not how a rescue or return from the realm is achieved. In “What Are Poets For?” Heidegger indeed writes: “Asserting remains a way and a means. By contrast, there is a saying that really engages in saying, yet without reflecting upon language, which would make even language into one more object” (*Poetry* 135). To discourse as assertion, which is “a way and a means,” like a tool in order to achieve a task, Heidegger opposes a discourse or “saying” that is more genuine or authentic—insofar as it “really engages in saying”—that is to say, a discourse that is an end in itself, but without it becoming an “object” of scrutiny.

In order to find an example of such non-assertive saying, Heidegger adds that one has to turn to “those who say in a greater degree, in the manner of the singer” (*Poetry* 135). He explains what he means by this in a passage where he quotes the poet Rainer Maria Rilke and makes use of the word “*Dasein*”:

Song is existence,  
says the third of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Part 1. The word for existence, *Dasein*, is used here in the traditional sense of presence and as a synonym for Being. To sing, truly to say worldly existence . . . means: to belong to the precinct of beings themselves. This precinct, as the very nature of language, is Being itself. To sing the song means to be present in what is present itself. It means: *Dasein*, existence. (*Poetry* 138)<sup>24</sup>

Because the meaning of Heidegger’s words is not straightforward, it is worth reformulating them in light of the ground this investigation has covered so far. Heidegger quotes Rilke saying that song is *Dasein*, and according to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, *Dasein* is what a person is since their worldly presence *is* their Being—presence and Being are synonymous, Heidegger thus writes above. Song *is* thus human being’s existence (*Dasein*), that is to say,

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<sup>24</sup> Each time the words “existence” or “*Dasein*” are used in this English translation I am quoting from, the original German text has only one word: “*Dasein*.”

singing is the manifestation of that existence—it is “truly to say worldly existence,” Heidegger writes above. Because Dasein’s Being is care according to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, it can be concluded that caring is the Being of what singing (Dasein) is—in other words, singing is caring, and song is a manifestation of care. However, the caring that singing is cannot be the overarching caring that encompasses all kinds of care and that includes inauthentic forms because, as was pointed out, singing is a particular kind of saying, or discourse. It is not an assertive one, not the *logos* of the “the logic of calculating reason [which] is itself the organization of the dominion of purposeful self-assertion in the objective” (*Poetry* 130). Moreover, Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* that inauthenticity is “a kind of not-Being” (*Being* 220), so singing can only pertain to authenticity given how Heidegger recurrently associates singing and Being in the above passage by writing that “song is existence, *Dasein* . . . a synonym for Being,” that to sing means to belong to Being, “the precinct of beings,” and that “[t]o sing the song means to be present in what is present itself.” The above idea that “to sing” should be “truly to say worldly existence” is also in keeping with what Heidegger writes about “poetical discourse” in *Being and Time*, which is that the latter is “a disclosing of existence” (*Being* 205), as was previously discussed. Poetry, or song, is thus a manifestation of authentic care.

The idea that poetry should pertain to authentic care is moreover reinforced by the connection there is between, on the one hand, listening and keeping silent—which Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time* and which I have argued pertain to authentic care—and, on the other hand, poetic thinking. Indeed, in section three of *Language After Heidegger*, entitled “Poetry and the Poetic,” Krzysztof Ziarek devotes a sub-section to “Silent Thought” (*Language* 142), explaining that, according to Heidegger, “poetic thinking takes its cue from ‘silence’” (*Language* 144). In a passage that also quotes Heidegger writing about “Restraint,” Ziarek writes:

Reticence or holding silent (*Stille halten*) becomes necessary as an adept way of thinking and writing, in order to shift writing away from being primarily an activity of enunciation and turn it into a form of response (*Antwort*), attentive to the inceptual word. As Heidegger remarks in *Contributions to Philosophy*, this is a “style” of thinking necessary for attentiveness to being as event: “*Restraint* / is the style of inceptual thinking . . .” (*Language* 142)

Without going into an in-depth explanation of what is meant by “inceptual thinking” or even poetic thinking, it is useful to note that his words on “Reticence or holding silent” as a way of turning away from “enunciation” correspond to the previously mentioned ideas of

turning away from a discourse based on assertion or declarative prediction. This, together with Ziarek's use of the terms "attentive" and "attentiveness to being"—even though they apply to poetic thinking, not discourse—I take as further indications that poetry, broadly conceived, pertains to authentic care such as Heidegger defines it in *Being and Time*. What poetic thinking entails will become apparent when this investigation moves gradually towards a discussion of the notions of dwelling and building, including when discussing Heidegger's essay on the poetic entitled "Building Dwelling Thinking." For the moment, the implications of the kind of saying or singing discussed in "What Are Poets For?" requires additional clarification, including so as to achieve a better understanding of what poetry has to do with the heart's space and how it rescues things from objectness through, or in, language.

What has the above analyses so far suggest is that, just as solicitude can be more or less helpful or authentic, so can poetic discourse be more or less the kind of authentic saying or genuine singing previously described. Indeed, Heidegger writes that "the saying that is more fully saying happens only sometimes . . . it is still hard. The hard thing is to accomplish existence" (*Poetry* 135). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger likewise argues that a "kind of *not-Being*" (*Being* 220) is that "in which Dasein maintains itself for the most part" (*Being* 220) because our everyday uses of words and relationships are average, deficient, and inauthentic: "[i]dle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterize the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is its 'there'" (*Being* 219). Moreover, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out that careless uses of words—such as speaking extensively or idle talk—are linked to the broader notion of authenticity and to other behaviours manifesting carelessness—such as curiosity and ambiguity. Likewise, in "What Are Poets For?", Heidegger stresses that the more difficult and more careful saying is not simply a matter "the work of language" but is part of a broader "work of the heart": "The hard thing consists not only in the difficulty of forming the work of language, but in the difficulty of going over from the saying work of the still covetous vision of things, from the work of the eyes, to the 'work of the heart.' The song is hard because the singing . . . must be existence" (*Poetry* 135-6). This passage pitches "the vision of things," which is "the work of the eyes" beholding objects at a distance, against "the work of the heart," which implies a deeper, more invisible, interior, emotional and sentimental relationship to things, as was previously discussed. If it is now clear that the "difficulty" in "going over" from one "saying work" to the other is due to the necessity of going against our tendencies to substantialise and

objectify, why is such a “going over” a “return from the realm of objects” (*Poetry* 129, emphasis added)? Moreover, what is it a return *to* given that everydayness is far from authentically caring?

To answer such questions, it is useful to bear in mind Heidegger’s phenomenological arguments in *Being and Time* according to which humans are *a priori* immersed in a network of meanings and that, conversely, any alleged detachment or objectivity comes *a posteriori*. In other words, even though we tend to think of ourselves as putting a subjective overlay on top of an *a priori* objective world, such a description does not reflect how we fundamentally are-in-the-world. The “return . . . into the innermost region of the heart’s space” (*Poetry* 129-130) is thus a return to an initial and fundamental experience of existence, one where things *a priori* stir up feelings and emotions in an “innermost” way, prior to any attempt at objectivity and detachment. This fundamental relationship to things is authentic both insofar as it is existence itself—such is Dasein—and insofar as only this kind of relationship can allow authentic care for Being to manifest itself. In other words, only this kind of relationship offers the possibility to care respectfully for the Being of something or someone in ways—such as “love” (*Poetry* 125)—that do not reduce it to present-at-hand substance or to an object. Although our everyday, average, and ordinary ways of speaking and of relating to things and people also reflect immersions in networks of meaning, these ways of being, however, are not manifestations of authentic care. The latter authentic care, like helpful solicitude or song, is “hard” and “only happens sometimes” (*Poetry* 135) because it requires respectfully paying attention to the Being of whatever or whoever is at stake, such as through listening, keeping silent, or a letting-be, and such behaviours go against our tendencies, they do not leap in, do not cover up superficially, and do not close off Being with indifference. Therefore, neither authentic care nor song mean letting one’s heart take over one’s reason, nor letting one’s personal web of relations blindly govern the ways in which one relates to things and people. Rather, song, like authentic care, requires awareness or recognition of, and paying attention to, Being—one’s own (Dasein) and that of other things or people. It is this awareness, or acknowledgement, and this attention—a form of listening or keeping silent—that allow one to choose to act or behave in ways that manifest authentic care, such as by helping in a genuinely helpful way (authentic solicitude), or saying in a way that really engages in saying (singing)—actions or behaviours that are fundamentally respectful of Being. If singing pertains to authenticity and is a deliberate discourse of authentic existence it is therefore

because, like helpful solicitude, it manifests a choice based on an awareness of and an attentiveness to Being.

Although *Being and Time* does not contain discussions of any ideas akin to “the innermost region of the heart’s space” (*Poetry* 130) or to how within such a space “love” (*Poetry* 125) is possible, this investigation previously showed how the idea of deliberately engaging in a closer attentiveness to Being—particularly someone else’s—is discussed by Heidegger in this early work. Moreover, discussing this work, Charles E. Scott argues that, according to Heidegger, “an inclination to compassion” (“Care” 66) becomes possible through a transcendence of the objective and tangible:

authentic people determine themselves with Dasein in mind. They care for the ontological difference that gives all living events transcendence of their objective values and identities. . . . authentic people are resolved – strongly dedicated and open – to an affirmative attunement in their daily lives to the non-objectifiable intangibility of all events. (“Care” 66)

Even though Scott’s analysis is focused on *Being and Time*, his explanations highlight how this early work contains some of the origins of the ideas Heidegger develops in “What Are Poets For?” about Pascal’s logic of the heart and its work’s relation to existence or Dasein. Scott’s term of “affirmative attunement” comes across as an equivalent of the notions previously discussed of an awareness of, and of an attentiveness to Being—both that of whatever or whoever is at stake (“all living events”) and one’s own (“Dasein”). Indeed, people behaving authentically are characterised by an awareness of and by an attendance to existence in a fundamental way—they “determine themselves with Dasein in mind,” as Scott puts it above—and by their choice (resolve) to go deeper than (to transcend) the “objective” so as to respect and attend to “non-objectifiable” Being. Such is the “ontological difference” they recognise and “care for.”

What is consequently becoming increasingly clear is that if the poet’s singing and what it manifests and implies can consistently be paralleled with statements about authenticity in *Being and Time*, then poetry in Heidegger’s later work is to be understood as a broad concept which encompasses behaviours—such as singing—much in the same way that authentic care was shown earlier in this investigation to encompass, in *Being and Time*, behaviours such as helpful solicitude or listening. In order to get a better understanding of what poetry is—other than the singing of poets—and how it pertains to authentic care, it is therefore worth investigating some of Heidegger’s other later essays such as “...Poetically Man Dwells...” It will then be possible to have a look at how the other behaviours he

describes as pertaining to poetry, such as dwelling, also pertain to authentic care. The title of that essay, moreover, is “taken from a late poem by Hölderlin” (*Poetry* 211) and it summarises Heidegger’s idea that “Poetry is what really lets us dwell” (*Poetry* 213). Focussing on “dwelling” by explaining what that concept entails is also relevant since, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes in his description of curiosity—which pertains to inauthentic care—that it has “the character of ‘never dwelling anywhere’” (*Being* 217).<sup>25</sup>

## 6. Dwelling, Poetry, and Authentic Care

What does “to dwell” mean exactly, and why does Heidegger write that “we are to think the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell” (*Poetry* 213)? Before looking at the poetic nature of dwelling, it is worth keeping in mind that “[w]hen Hölderlin speaks of dwelling, he has before his eyes the basic character of human existence” (*Poetry* 213). Human existence, or Dasein, “in the very basis of its Being, is care,” as Heidegger wrote in *Being and Time* (*Being* 322), so dwelling must consequently be a fundamental way—“the basic character”—in which a person cares. Pragmatically, Dasein “cultivates the growing things of the earth and takes care of his increase. Cultivating and caring (*colere, cultura*) are a kind of building” Heidegger writes (*Poetry* 215). Although the words “care” and “caring” are used in this sentence to describe what human existence involves, they are not used as a way of characterising dwelling, but, more precisely, building. The connection between dwelling and building—and how, together, they are linked to Being and to care—therefore needs to be explained. The following extract from Heidegger’s essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” makes those connections clear:

What, then, does *Bauen*, building, mean? The Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in a place. . . . *Bauen* originally means to dwell. . . . *bauen, buan, bhu, beo* are our word *bin* in the versions: *ich bin*, I am, *du bist*, you are, the imperative form *bis*, be. What then does *ich bin* mean? The old world *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin, du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. . . . this word *bauen* however *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord. Building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything” (*Poetry* 145).

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<sup>25</sup> This is far from being Heidegger’s only use of the verb “to dwell” in *Being and Time*; in his analysis of hearing, Heidegger for instance writes that Dasein “certainly does not dwell proximally alongside ‘sensations’” (*Being* 207).

Using etymology, Heidegger fundamentally links to dwell, to be and to build, insisting, as in “...Poetically Man Dwells...”, that care is “*also*” implied in that latter word. The care described is moreover clearly of a helpful or positive kind given both the terms Heidegger uses (“to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for,” “takes care,” “preserving and nurturing”), and the imagery of cultivating plants and allowing them to grow. Heidegger’s insistence on the idea that the building he describes is not a “making” of anything—but a respectful attentiveness to what is there and needs looking after, such as a “vine”—suggests that authentic care characterises human dwelling, Being, and building. Another indication of this lies in the above idea that “to dwell . . . signifies: to remain, to stay in a place.” Indeed, in *Being and Time*, curiosity—a form of inauthenticity which has “the character of ‘*never dwelling anywhere*’”—is additionally described as a “not tarrying”: “curiosity is characterised by a specific way of not tarrying alongside what is closest. Consequently it does not seek the leisure of tarrying observantly” (*Being* 216). These words, particularly the notion of “tarrying observantly,” further suggest that Heidegger’s notions of dwelling and building pertain to authentic care as the fundamental way in which a person (Dasein) *is*—if and when they respect their own Being as Dasein.

Additional indications of this can moreover be found in the following lines from “Building Dwelling Thinking”:

The Old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian*, like the old word *bauen*, mean to remain, to stay in a place. But the Gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means to spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare. Real sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we “free” it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.* (*Poetry* 146-7)

It was necessary to quote Heidegger’s use of etymology to understand how the latter supports his conclusion that “*sparing and preserving*”—terms that call to mind attention and care for something—are “[t]he *fundamental character of dwelling*.” Heidegger moreover chooses to add the adjective “real” in front of “sparing”—a word suggesting authenticity, as was also the case in his description of “a saying that really engages in saying” (*Poetry* 135). That such a “real sparing is something *positive*” which “return[s]” something “to its being” and makes it ““free”” is an indication of authenticity, particularly

since, as was discussed earlier, Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* that helpful solicitude also makes free: “This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care – that is, to the existence of the Other, . . . it helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for it*” (*Being* 159). Moreover, in “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger further explains that “the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve” (*Poetry* 148) before linking dwelling to saving, and arguing that “to save really means to set something free into its own presencing” (*Poetry* 148) while “to spare and preserve means: to take under our care, to look after” (*Poetry* 149). Heidegger’s understanding of dwelling and building are thus suffused with ideas pertaining to authentic care: a respect for Being manifested in a genuine, careful attentiveness that releases or frees, preserves, spares, safeguards, protects, nurtures, and even cherishes, as was quoted earlier (*Poetry* 145).

What remains to be explained, however, is the way in which dwelling and building are poetic. Now that the link between authentic care, dwelling, and building has been made clearer, exploring and explaining the poetic dimension of the latter two terms will clarify the ways in which poetry manifests authentic care. For instance, going back to the notions of preserving, sparing and saving that Heidegger describes as characterising dwelling, what exactly is preserved, spared and saved, and how? Is it Being, through poetry? Do the notions of saving, sparing and preserving have to do with a return into the innermost region of the heart, and with rescuing things from objectification? So as to answer such questions, it is helpful to turn to an example Heidegger discusses in “Building Dwelling Thinking.” Writing about a bridge, he argues that its Being is not limited to geometrical shape and what it is made of; that is to say, a bridge is not merely an arch made of stone or steel spanning something. Rather, a bridge is intrinsically embedded in a world, linked to a context, to whatever it is bridging that gave rise to the need for its construction in the first place: “With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them” (*Poetry* 150). Heidegger’s description suggests that, like Dasein, a bridge is in-a-world, part of a network of roads and human needs, in a landscape with specific slopes and rocks, and that a bridge’s Being is, fundamentally, its *being there*. Just as with human beings, caring properly for a bridge—including as an engineer—involves paying close attention to its Being as defined above, and not merely considering it as, say, a stone arch spanning a river. Moreover, becoming aware of or recognising this Being requires a dwelling-with, a tarrying-alongside it; this acknowledgement of Being and any



subsequent attentive care for it cannot be achieved on it from a decontextualized standpoint.

If dwelling and building are to care authentically, they therefore cannot decontextualise a thing and reduce it to a detached object; they have to preserve, spare or save the entire network of relations that goes together with whatever is at stake and which needs to be acknowledged and respected. Heidegger does this himself in *Being and Time* insofar as he is careful to preserve, spare or save the Being of humans by using the word Dasein to refer to us, and by stressing our being-in-the-world. This latter term intrinsically links—and literally so, since it hyphenates—Being and world, with the use of the preposition ‘in’ which, unlike ‘on,’ ‘over’ or ‘against,’ further stresses immersion or embedding. Likewise, in “Building Dwelling Thinking” Heidegger seeks to rehabilitate the term *thing* as a word which implies, summons or gathers a context or world: “Gathering or assembly, by an ancient word of our language, is called ‘thing’” (*Poetry* 151). In a passage reminiscent of the phenomenological arguments put forward in *Being and Time*, Heidegger further explains:

Our thinking has of course long been accustomed to *understate* the nature of the thing. The consequence, in the course of Western thought, has been that the thing is represented as an unknown X to which perceptible properties are attached. From this point of view, everything *that already belongs to the gathering nature of this thing* does, of course, appear as something that is afterward read into it. Yet the bridge would never be a mere bridge if it were not a thing. (*Poetry* 151)

The last sentence of this passage reformulates some of the ideas developed in *Being and Time* according to which attempts at objectivity, say, at hearing pure noise, is an *a posteriori* frame of mind involving extraction from context, from a network of relations that was initially present. Abstraction is thus subtraction and reduction. As a consequence, whatever acknowledges the world or context that a being gathers does not add anything to it but simply acknowledges and respects that being as the totality which it is—a thing as opposed to an object. Does poetry do this since, as song, it is existence? If so, how exactly does it do this, and why does Heidegger write that “[p]oetry is what really lets us dwell” (*Poetry* 213)? So as to answer such questions, it is first of all necessary to get a better understanding of what is gathered, according to Heidegger, in a thing; what poetry does with this will then be investigated.

I have so far used the terms context and world to describe the totality that surrounds and is intrinsically part of a thing’s Being, but Heidegger’s word is the fourfold of

“earth and sky, divinities and mortals” (*Poetry* 147). Such is the totality that frames, as with four corners, or *encompasses*, with four cardinal directions, human experience, with the horizontality of earth all around and the verticality of sky out of reach, with the finitude of mortality within us and the infinitude of divinity beyond us. “Mortals *are* in the fourfold by *dwelling*”, Heidegger writes (*Poetry* 148), and his stressing of the verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to dwell’ emphasises the fact that both go together and that the fourfold is the fabric of the world in which humans dwell, are, and care; such is, fundamentally, the context of our existence, our being there. Things also authentically *are*, for humans, within this fourfold: “dwelling itself is always a staying with things. Dwelling, as preserving, keeps the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in things. . . . Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things” (*Poetry* 149). This passage confirms two points made earlier. First, the fact that dwelling should be a “staying with things” indicates that it is the opposite of curiosity, which Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* as superficial, inauthentic, and characterised by “not tarrying alongside what is closest” (*Being* 216). Second, that dwelling preserves, saves, or “keeps the fourfold . . . in things” confirms that dwelling considers a thing within the world or context of relations that gives it meaning and constitutes its Being. In other words, dwelling authentically cares for the Being of a thing by preventing it from becoming an object, it spares it the process of subtraction or abstraction characteristic of the logic of calculating reason. Indeed, Heidegger writes in “The Thing” that “the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object” (*Poetry* 165). It is thus necessary to “step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains” (*Poetry* 179) because abstract or representational thinking decontextualizes and drags the fourfold, or world, out of things. The term ‘world’ is also used by Heidegger in this way, such as in the following sentence from “Language”: “The unitary fourfold of sky and earth, mortals and divinities, which is stayed in the thinging of things, we call—the world” (*Poetry* 197).

How, then, does “thinging” occur; or, using Heidegger’s words: “when and in what way do things appear as things?” (*Poetry* 179). The aforementioned notions of tarrying alongside or staying with point towards the answer: *nearness* is indispensable since “[i]n the default of nearness the thing remains annihilated as a thing in our sense” (*Poetry* 179). This is clear if we consider the kind of abstract representation involved in thinking of geometrical objects: strictly speaking, a line is infinite, and I can picture, describe, or speak of the properties of a red sphere or of a blue right-angled triangle with notions of context,

proximity or distance being completely irrelevant. By contrast, “[i]f we think of the thing as thing, then we spare and protect the thing’s presence in the region from which it presences. Thining is the nearing of world” (*Poetry* 179). The terms *region* and *world* stress the importance of context, which, in order to be acknowledged, respected and preserved, requires a being-with, a presence in proximity, i.e., nearness. This is also why, in *Being and Time*, curiosity is described not only as a “not tarrying” but as having the characteristic of “not tarrying alongside what is *closest*” (*Being* 216, emphasis added). Together with the notion of nearness, the fact that Heidegger uses the term ‘region’ when describing the heart and its work—as opposed to the distant detachment of objectifying and calculating reason—suggests that “thinging” (*Poetry* 179) involves letting ourselves be *touched* by things—emotionally and sentimentally—or at least acknowledging that our relationships with things include an *a priori* affective proximity, which *a posteriori* attempts to do away with. Heidegger’s words thus point towards the fact that although *Being and Time* is primarily centred on a description of the Being of humans, as Dasein, and although this stands in contrast with his later essays centred more on the Being of a thing, the latter cannot be separated from Dasein, from human care and being-in-the-world. Consequently, in a poem, if it is authentic—i.e. if it is *song*, a saying of existence—“thinging” (*Poetry* 179) should also occur.

So as to understand how this might happen, Heidegger’s essay “The Thing” proves helpful as it discusses the example of a jug in order to demonstrate the importance of tarrying, of dwelling or staying with things in nearness to pay attentive respect to the fourfold they gather. Heidegger explains that, if one considers what a jug is from the point of view of the logic of calculating reason, one is left with an abstract representation of an open, standing container that is able to hold a liquid—such is its scientific definition, so to speak. Heidegger asks “[b]ut—is this reality the jug? No” (*Poetry* 168) because instead of speaking of the reality of, say, a “wine-filled jug” (*Poetry* 168), the scientific definition leads us away from it and is indifferent to “what is real,” compelling us instead to “put in its place a hollow within which a liquid spreads. Science makes the jug-thing into a nonentity” (*Poetry* 168), Heidegger writes. There is a paucity of context or world in this definition; it lacks Dasein, existence, and does not convey how the jug is dealt with, cared for, lived alongside, appropriated, or even simply used. It ignores, for instance, “the outpouring for which the jug is fitted as a jug” (*Poetry* 169)—a comment that highlights how it is the jug’s relation to and purpose for humans that accounts for the jug’s physical characteristic, of it

being filled and holding liquid. Heidegger stresses this point and explains: “In the outpouring, the holding is authentically how it is. To pour from the jug is to give. The holding of the vessel occurs in the giving of the outpouring. . . . The jug’s jug-character consists in the poured gift of the pouring out. . . . the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug” (*Poetry* 169-70). The reason Heidegger insists on outpouring is because he then shows how, by paying more closely attention to that which the jug is and does—outpouring—one is able to understand how the fourfold is gathered, how the totality of a world transpires. The jug, like the spring, gives water—which comes from the *sky* and is both held and poured out by the *earth*; when holding wine too the jug gathers earth and sky since together those two give humans the grape—ripened by the sun, watered by rain, and rooted in the right kind of soil. Hence: “In the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell” (*Poetry* 170). Moreover, if Heidegger mentions gift-giving it is because this outpour indicates the necessity for us to be given and to receive drinks, and this point towards the other two dimensions of the fourfold that have not been mentioned so far: mortals and divinities. Indeed, “[t]he gift of the pouring out is drink for mortals. It quenches their thirst” (*Poetry* 170) while the divinities grant water and life itself, and are thanked in return by a pouring out—a libation—of a liquid product of human dwelling and building, such as wine or oil: “The outpouring is the libation poured out for the immortal gods. The gift of the outpouring as libation is the authentic gift” (*Poetry* 170).<sup>26</sup> So as to further strengthen his arguments on gift-giving and outpouring, Heidegger uses etymology: “The consecrated libation is what our word for a strong outpouring flow, ‘gush,’ really designates: gift and sacrifice. ‘Gush,’ Middle English *guschen*, *gosschen*—cf. German *Guss*, *Giessen*—is the Greek *cheein*, the Indoeuropean *ghu*. It means to offer in sacrifice. . . . In the gift of the outpouring earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*” (*Poetry* 170-1). The fact that, in this passage as in previous ones, Heidegger refers to etymology, and the way he carefully chooses his words to refer to the Being of what he describes (be it Dasein for humans or outpouring for jugs) indicates an important connection between words,

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<sup>26</sup> Although Heidegger’s description corresponds to polytheistic rites of ancient Greece, the argument he makes is not circumscribed to this particular culture, and not only because anthropology shows that there have been divinities in most human cultures, but also because of the equally universal importance of gift-giving, which the French sociologist Marcel Mauss discusses in his anthropological and philosophical work *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*. Heidegger may have read this work by the time he wrote “The Thing,” given both that it was published in the mid-1920s and that Heidegger had philosophically-minded acquaintances in France, such as the poet René Char, whom he visited in Provence.

dwelling, and authentic care. So far, dwelling has shown its poetic dimension mainly through its characterisation in relation to Dasein, i.e. human existence—which poetry, as song, is—and because of its authentic care for Being, manifested towards things by tarrying or staying with them, sparing them from representational abstraction, and acknowledging how they gather the fourfold in them. However, Heidegger’s use of words, and the way he shows the ontological wealth that their meaning harbours, points towards another, more literal and linguistic connection between dwelling and poetry. Perhaps it is also because “Language itself is poetry in the essential sense,” as Heidegger writes in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” (*Poetry* 72) that “Poetry is what really lets us dwell” (*Poetry* 213). What Heidegger means by such statements and this question of the relationships between things, words, language, poetry and dwelling now calls for further study.

## 7. Language, Authentic Care, and Poetry

The example of the jug suggests a correspondence between the dwelling with objects Heidegger describes and his own paying close attention to and tarrying with words; his text exemplifies the building—with words—that he describes. The text, in this respect, is both a *logos* and a *topos* in which words are the things that are stayed near. Heidegger’s views on language moreover indicate that, according to him, it is through words, in language, that the aforementioned “thinging” (*Poetry* 179) occurs. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” he thus writes: “Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to word and to appearance” (*Poetry* 71). Likewise, in his essay “Language” he holds that “In the naming, the things named are called into their thinging. Thinging, they unfold world” (*Poetry* 197). These statements suggest that a noun is like a name that summons a thing’s Being, that it calls the thing into being there, into existence, into the “world” that characterises its Being and that makes it the thing that it is (“called into . . . thinging”). This was already perceptible in this investigation’s earlier discussion of why Michael Inwood, explaining Heidegger’s position, writes, “Words and the entities they apply to are not two disparate realms” (*Heidegger* 41). The terms ‘cow’ and ‘God’ were then discussed,<sup>27</sup> but briefly discussing a third noun at this stage of this investigation will provide one more example of the ways in which a word brings forth a world. The word ‘breakfast,’ especially if it is heard

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<sup>27</sup> Inwood’s words were discussed towards the end of part 4, as was the word ‘cow.’ The word ‘God’ was discussed at the beginning of part 5.

shouted out in a house in the morning, summons, or brings to mind food—which will depend on one's *topos*, with its climate (sky) and produce (earth)—such as porridge and eggs or pastries and jam. It is also a word that contains, gathers, and discloses the (mortal) need for food after the night's *fast* which this meal *breaks*. As such, it is a reminder of our finitude that may call to mind the converse infinitude characteristic of the divine, and that may trigger gift-receiving feelings of gratitude. Language is thus essentially poetry which “lets us dwell” since, in the naming that occurs in language, the way the things words refer to gather the fourfold (thinging) is nominated and called into appearance (“they unfold world”).

While it is now clearer how a gathering and unfolding of a world in things is possible through the calling or nominating that occurs in language through naming, it is also becoming increasingly apparent that an awareness and a deliberate care and close attention—a kind of listening—is also required. Given the connection between words and things, just as “things themselves secure the fourfold *only when* they themselves *as* things are let be in their presencing” (*Poetry* 149)—which implies not taking an additional step of detachment and objectification—so too is it possible to hear the world in a word only if a listening occurs—as opposed, for instance, to speaking extensively or idle talk. In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger thus writes of poetry that it “does not consist in a clutching or any other kind of grasping, but rather in a letting come of what has been dealt out” (*Poetry* 222). Heidegger's words “clutching” and “grasping” suggest that if the poet was not respectful and attentive in this way, they would make a mistake similar to the one made in harmful solicitude since in both cases an inappropriate kind of concern for the ready-to-hand would be manifested—a kind of grabbing, as of a tool. How, then, can poetry be a building that does not clutch words like tools? How can it be song if it requires a kind of listening that keeps silent and lets be? In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger writes that “Poetry is a measuring” (*Poetry* 219), a statement that needs to be clarified in order for this investigation to understand how poetry reconciles song and listening, building and letting-be.

Heidegger develops the idea of poetry as a measuring in the following terms: “Poetry, as the authentic gauging of the dimension of dwelling, is the primal form of building. Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being. Poetry is the original admission of dwelling. . . . Authentic building occurs so far as there are

poets, such poets as take the measure for architecture, the structure of dwelling” (*Poetry* 225). Heidegger’s words “gauging” and “tak[ing] the measure” suggest a fourfold exploration such as the one Heidegger does when describing the wine-filled jug, or as in the above study of ‘breakfast.’ Although gauging and measure are steps one usually takes *before* building, Heidegger describes these *as* building, so a poetic work about breakfast or a jug would not simply involve a preliminary fourfold awareness of the world gathered in those things but it would set that world up, have it built it into it, and disclose it. Heidegger does not limit poetry to a particular relationships to words, however, for he writes in “The Origin of the Work of Art” that “the nature of art is poetry” (*Poetry* 75). Therefore, the kind of linguistic “spanning” (*Poetry* 221) of the fourfold discussed above only gives a limited glimpse of what poetry involves, since “[p]oetry is thought of here in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate unity of being with language and word, that we must leave open whether art, in all its modes from architecture to poesy, exhausts the nature of poetry” (*Poetry* 71-2). The broadness here at stake, together with the aforementioned “primal” and “original” nature of the “authentic gauging” or measuring that poetry does (*Poetry* 225), is due to the fact that, according to Heidegger, there is more to words and naming than the process previously discussed. Indeed, at one point in his essay “Language,” Heidegger stops using the term ‘word’ and introduces “dif-ference” (*Poetry* 200) as the idea of a space or “dimension” (*Poetry* 200) which poet-artists measure, gauge, span and build in. Getting a better understanding of what poetry is and implies according to Heidegger therefore requires clarifying what he means by “dif-ference” and why he uses that word.

The parallel drawn earlier between relationships to words and relationship to things, and the idea of *logos* as *topos* must be qualified because Heidegger writes that there is a space *between* words and things and that it is this *topos*, this “dif-ference,” that poetry explores. He writes:

The word consequently no longer means a distinction established between objects only by our representations. Nor is it merely a relation obtaining between world and thing, so that a representation coming upon it can establish it. . . . The dif-ference is neither distinction nor relation. The dif-ference is, at most, dimension for world and thing. . . . The dif-ference, as the middle for world and things, metes out the measure of their presence. (*Poetry* 200)

Does the fact that Heidegger stops using the term ‘word’ and starts using “dif-ference” suggest that the latter is the preferred term, just as, in *Being and Time* Heidegger introduces “Dasein” as a way of speaking of human beings in a more phenomenologically

accurate way? Although such a parallel can be drawn between those two shifts to underline a continuity in Heidegger's methodology and writing, its scope is limited by the fact that "dif-ference" is not a term Heidegger uses consistently throughout a range of essays. Introducing "dif-ference" is, as I understand it, a way for Heidegger to point towards the idea that there is more to a 'word' than what our superficial understanding of it confines it to. The German word for 'difference' is *Unterschied* which includes a prefix *unter* meaning 'under' and *schied*, from *scheiden* which translates ideas of separation or partition; both *Unterschied* and 'dif-ference,' especially with the hyphen, thus indicate a partition or a gap. A word therefore is, or opens up, a space in which a gathering of the fourfold is possible, a dimension in which a thing's world can unfold. It is because of this space that a nearing, a dwelling in proximity is possible and required in order to care authentically for things, and it is because of it too that the distance and detachment of objectivity and abstraction are possible. A key characteristic of the dif-ference, according to Heidegger, is its "stillness" (*Poetry* 204), which he contrasts with both "the motionless" (*Poetry* 204) and "soundlessness" (*Poetry* 204). These two terms suggest a lack, whereas there is nothing negative about stillness; stillness nevertheless combines those same features insofar as it implies, to be respected and maintained, both keeping silent and staying—as opposed to constantly moving on and never tarrying with what is closest, which is characteristic of curiosity (*Being* 216). Heidegger adds that "the dif-ference stills the thing, as thing, into the world" (*Poetry* 204) and explains that "the dif-ference calls world and thing into the middle of their intimacy. The dif-ference is the bidder" (*Poetry* 204). I understand this as an invitation to think of a word as a kind of space or opening within the dimension of language, where a thing's relationship with the world is settled, or falls into place. Heidegger thereby offers an understanding of words that challenges our conceptions of them as firmly established labels for objects, as tools or as building blocks, and this different way of conceiving of words questions and casts a new light on the ways in which both ordinary people and poets relate to them.

Indeed, the dif-ference, in stillness, "calls" (*Poetry* 204), according to Heidegger; it is a silence that bids for a response, like a void attracting matter, like a gap that speakers try to build bridges across: "Mortals speak insofar as they listen. They heed the bidding call of the stillness of the dif-ference. . . . This speaking that listens and accepts is responding" (*Poetry* 206). The speaking Heidegger describes in this way is a fundamental, authentic, original speaking, which is also what poetry, the "saying that really engages in saying"



(*Poetry* 134-5), is. This equivalence of poetry with original, authentic speech explains why Heidegger writes that “everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer” (*Poetry* 205). In everyday language, humans are thus like walkers so indifferent to, or so preoccupied by, their tasks that they are unaware that the ground they are walking on—the way they go about in the world, including through language, by relating to things and using words referring to them—is in fact a bridge they have built over a chasm. They have lost sight of the gap, and they do not listen to realise that their speech is a response to that chasm; they just speak inauthentically, extensively, idly (which is why the call of stillness “hardly resounds”). They do so even though it is out of that gap that the bridge they are using originally arose, as a response to it. Conversely, poetry is the “primal form of building” (*Poetry* 225) because, realising our fundamental responsibility for the ways we choose to relate to things, people, and words, it chooses to respond to it in a way that does not take the Being of any of those things, people or words for granted and that does not reduce it through processes of objectification and abstraction. It does so by authentically caring, by respectfully paying attention to that Being—which includes the ways it is part of networks of meaning—and by acknowledging, letting-be and disclosing it instead of closing it off or covering it up.

A parallel can therefore be drawn between inauthentic or harmful solicitude and inauthentic forms of speech such as idle talk or speaking extensively. Both are characterised by a hurried, concerned, and careless response, while, conversely, both helpful solicitude and poetry are characterised by an attentive and respectful awareness and acknowledgement of Being. That is to say, speech, like solicitude, can be authentic or inauthentic. Either it takes the form of a careful, attentive wording that allows a world to unfold through the gathering of fourfold in things that are named—which is what poetry as song, and language in its essence and origin, do. Or, it goes in the opposite direction, characterised by a forgetfulness of this essential capacity of language and it fills instead stillness and silence with a constant flow of words. Likewise, solicitude is a response to a kind of bidding that arises from individuals or situations that call for help or assistance. This response can be characterised by careful attention being paid to the other person’s Being, as caring Dasein, and by respectfully helping them take care of the situation or task at stake—authentic, helpful solicitude is then manifested. Alternatively, this response can be characterised more by a passing over of concern whereby the other is pushed to the side,

displaced or replaced, so that the situation or task at stake is put into someone else's hands and is taken care of—which is what inauthentic, harmful solicitude does.

Moreover, just as Heidegger's later work contains the notion of a call of stillness that is to be listened and responded to, likewise his early work *Being and Time* contains the idea of "Conscience as the Call of Care" (*Being* 319). Conscience is what calls us to authenticity; it "summons Dasein's Self from its lostness in the 'they'" (*Being* 319). Like stillness, it is silent: "[t]he call dispenses with any kind of utterance. It does not put itself into words at all; . . . *Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent*" (*Being* 318). I understand the idea of conscience being "the call of care" in a twofold—both original and authentic—sense. Firstly, it is because humans are conscious—aware of existence, of being there (Dasein)—that they are able to care, which is the ontological superstructure of human behaviours and actions. In other words, if things matter to us and if we have to deal with them, it is first and foremost because we are conscious of our being wherever it is that we are. This primal or original response—an awareness of the fact that we are there, free and responsible for our actions and their consequences—is what explains that conscience is also the call of *authentic* care. When we recover this primal awareness—when we listen to the call of conscience anew—we are able to care authentically, i.e. to act in respectful, attentive freedom and responsibility. Likewise, recovering an awareness of difference—listening to the call of stillness—enables one to respond and speak authentically, i.e., poetically. Poetry therefore becomes possible when, heeding the call of conscience, one decides to turn away from the 'they' of everydayness, including its ordinary use of language, so as to care authentically—including towards language and, through words and beyond them, for the Beings of things. Poets do so by listening to the stillness of the difference, which means that they acknowledge or take the measure of the space each word provides for a thing to gather the fourfold. Poets respond to that stillness by a careful speech, or building, that respectfully unfolds that world, or network of meaning, thereby disclosing both existence—being-there (Dasein)—and a thing's Being—what it fundamentally is.

## 8. Closing Remarks

This chapter has demonstrated how there is a continuity in Heidegger's thinking about care, and how poetry, particularly because of its relationship to Being, is central to that continuity. I first pointed out that, crucial among the different forms of care that

Heidegger describes in *Being and Time*, is authentic care. The latter is manifested when a behaviour, such as helpful solicitude, acknowledges, respects, reveals, preserves or sustains the Being of someone or something. Poetry as Heidegger understands it, and particularly as he describes it in his later essays, I have argued, pertains to authentic care and is a manifestation of it. I thus pointed out, for instance, how ideas of a preservation, nurturing, fostering, cultivating, saving or salvaging of Being are also used by Heidegger to describe poetry in his later essays, particularly when he explains how poetry is linked to notions of dwelling and building. I have also discussed the ways in which poetry respectfully acknowledges and discloses the Being of something, that is to say, how it manifests authentic care in language and through its relationship to words. Poetry as Heidegger understands it moreover pertains to authentic care because it reveals one's being-in-the-world—*how* one cares—which is what one, i.e. Dasein, *is*. To put this differently, including in the terms Heidegger uses to describe authentic solicitude in *Being and Time*, poetry gives one's care back into one's hands—it “give[s] it back . . . authentically as such for the first time” (*Being* 158-9)—as it manifests, brings about, expresses, reveals and allows one to realise who or what someone or something is and can be. In this respect, “it helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for it*” (*Being* 159).

I stress this parallel between poetry and authentic solicitude because there are similarities between my work and the one undertaken, in *Inflected Language*, by Krzysztof Ziarek, who points out “the ethical tenor of the terms recurring throughout Heidegger's work, which evidences how important indeed it is to realize that the Heideggerian idiom of taking care, sheltering, keeping guard, or attending to has as much cognitive as ethical significance” (*Inflected* 60). My work in this chapter, like his, has reached “into the often unexplored aspects of Heidegger's work: the ontologico-ethical dimensions of his work on poetry,” (*Inflected* 7) however, one significant difference between my approach and Ziarek's is betrayed by the way his statement above ends: “and the place of otherness in it.” Ziarek reads Heidegger alongside—and partly through the prism of—Emmanuel Levinas and the latter's views on otherness, claiming that “Levinas's polemics with Heidegger not only opens the possibility but in fact makes unavoidable a reading of Heidegger from the point of view of ‘ethical alterity’” (*Inflected* 6). Not only does my work not discuss Levinas's, the purpose of this chapter has been less to discuss the ethics underlying Heidegger's poetics as to map out those poetics all the while demonstrating how at their core and foundation lies the phenomenological concept of care, and, more specifically, the “ontologico-ethical”

notion of authentic care. I borrow Ziarek's term "ontologico-ethical" because it usefully makes apparent that ontology and ethics go together in Heidegger's work—as this chapter pointed out when demonstrating how authentic care is characterised by a respectful attentiveness to Being.<sup>28</sup> The centrality of the notion of care in Heidegger's poetics, together with the fact that poetry as he describes it manifests authentic care, account for why his work invites us "to understand and experience entities as being richer in meaning than we are capable of ever fully doing justice to conceptually," to borrow Iain D. Thomson's words from *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (212).

While the ways in which poetry and authentic care acknowledge, respect, and open up ontological and semantic wealth and potential—as opposed to closing these off—was discussed with the use of several examples, I must concede that in spite of this ethically valuable stance, Heidegger's poetics are ambiguous enough to allow for questionable interpretations of what his ideas imply in terms of politics. I say this not only because of Heidegger's ties with Nazism, but because of the ways in which the translation of the notion of authenticity into political views is potentially problematic. Both Christopher Macann, in "Who is Dasein?," and Douglas Kellner, in "Authenticity and Heidegger's Challenge to Ethical Theory," have pointed out, for instance, how Heidegger's notion of the resolute<sup>29</sup> and authentic self allows for a reading of it whereby an individual such as Adolf Hitler may be looked up to as a hero-figure (Kellner 204) and be described as a paradigmatic example of a resolute and authentic self (Macann 242). However, in spite of such pitfalls that Heidegger's ideas contain or potentially allow one to fall into, the aim of Kellner and Macann's articles is to sketch out what a Heideggerian ethics of authenticity—and the benefits of the latter—might look like. Moreover, and in an article with a similar aim entitled "The Question of Ethics in Heidegger's Account of Authenticity," Charles E. Scott writes that authenticity means that "[w]e stand out in the questionableness of our ethos, knowing less who we are and who we are to be, in silence before the decisions that we have to make" ("Question" 222). Scott thereby argues that authenticity challenges

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<sup>28</sup> Ziarek thus points out "Heidegger's insistent erasure of the traditional boundary between ontology and ethics" (*Inflected* 61) and, similarly, Julian Young writes, in *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*: "ontology is ethics. . . . To adopt . . . a proper relation to Being and to truth . . . to become, in other words, one who dwells, is to understand a great deal about how one is to act or, at least, about how one is to 'ponder' about how to act. It is, in short, to possess an ethics" (119-20).

<sup>29</sup> This term from *Being and Time* characterises Dasein's authentic behaviour, or being-in-the-world, after it has freed itself from the domination of the 'they': "resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is authentically nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*," Heidegger writes (*Being* 344).

essentialist, univocal affirmations of what someone or something *is* by pointing out the contextual nature and the contingency of any such definition. This idea of “knowing less who we are and who we are to be” stands in stark contrast to the thought that Hitler exemplifies an authentic and resolute self—an opposition that highlights the complex and contentious nature of Heidegger’s concept of authenticity.

What these points make apparent is that doing further justice to the political implications of Heidegger’s ideas on authenticity and poetry—all the while studying their philosophical value from the perspective of literary criticism and the history of ideas—is beyond the scope of this investigation. Although this study has discussed both the concept of authenticity and poetry’s ties with the ethical benefits that stem from not closing off Being, I have not attempted to map out—nor have I discussed, as Kellner, Macann or Scott do—the danger or the worth of a Heideggerian ethics or politics of authenticity or of the resolute self *per se*. I have only used the idea of authenticity as an operative and pointing tool in my discussion of care and poetry, arguing that, with respect to those, it refers to behaviours, activities, or ways of being and speaking that recognise, let-be, respect, and leave Being open instead of closing it off. In *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei likewise argues that “[p]oetically rendered, authenticity is a nonpossessive attunement to alternative horizons of meaning which render the wold, poetically, plurisignificant” (243). If poetry pertains to authentic care it is thus because, on the one hand, it can be respectful of a thing or person’s Being by acknowledging and opening readers to ontological and semantic wealth. On the other hand, poetry also pertains to authentic care insofar as, or when, it is able to acknowledge, manifest, make perceptible, and foster an awareness of the fundamental, phenomenological connection between ontology and care—i.e., the fact that *what* things and people are (including ourselves), is inseparable from and decided by our relationships to them, by *how* we are. Gosetti-Ferencei thus concludes: “[p]oetry is—and perhaps this is the measure of authentic poetry—a tentative, never ontologically final, preservation of the mysteries and possibilities of (being-in-) the world” (258).

One of the ways in which poetry preserves “mysteries,” as Gosetti-Ferencei puts it above, has to do with two points this investigation touched upon—when discussing poetry with regard to what Heidegger calls the fourfold—but which were not discussed in depth: poetry’s relation to both death (mortals) and to what is sacred and holy (divinities).

Heidegger discusses both these topics in “What Are Poets For?”<sup>30</sup> and he also writes about Dasein’s relation to death in *Being and Time*<sup>31</sup> but this study has not investigated those topics in detail because they are less relevant—than his arguments about phenomenology or poetry’s relation to people and things—to the points made by the other authors discussed in the other chapters of this study. It is enough, for the purpose of this investigation, to briefly mention that poetry, according to Heidegger’s later essays, also authentically cares for these aspects of Dasein’s Being—which is consistent with the notion that “song is existence” (*Poetry* 138). The idea that a care for all (fourfold) aspects of existence should allow humans to live more authentically is moreover already present in Heidegger’s early work, notably in a passage from *Being and Time* which follows Heidegger’s comments on the fable of the goddess Cura—a fable discussed at the very beginning of this investigation:

Burdach calls attention to a double meaning of the term ‘cura’ according to which it signifies not only ‘anxious exertion’ but also ‘carefulness’ and ‘devotedness’. Thus Seneca writes in his last epistle (*Ep.* 124): ‘Among the four existent Natures (trees, beasts, man and God), the latter two, which alone are endowed with reason, are distinguished in that God is immortal while man is mortal. Now when it comes to these, the good of the one, namely God, is fulfilled by his Nature; but that of the other, man, is fulfilled by *care* (*cura*): “*unius bonum natura perficit, dei scilicet, alterius cura, hominis.*”

Man’s *perfectio*—his transformation into that which he can be in Being-free for his ownmost possibilities (projection)—is ‘accomplished’ by ‘care’. (243)

Not only does Heidegger’s reference to “the four existent Natures” anticipate his later writings about the fourfold, the idea that care *fulfils the good of man*—particularly in that care also means “‘carefulness’ and ‘devotedness’”—suggests human existence as a whole can benefit from authentic care. Poetry, this chapter has shown, provides a way of understanding this positive “transformation” of human existence into what it can authentically be; in other words, as a manifestation of authentic care, as song, poetry allows us to see what the “*perfectio*” of authentic human existence implies and how it can be, if not “accomplish[ed],” at least approached. What these words from *Being and Time*

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<sup>30</sup> Heidegger argues that “the constant negation of death” (*Poetry* 122) is due to the fact that only what is objectively demonstrated, substance-like and countable is recognised “as being and as positive” (*Poetry* 122); “By this negation death itself becomes something negative” (*Poetry* 122). If we are—as Rilke puts it in words quoted by Heidegger—“to read the word ‘death’ *without negation*” (*Poetry* 122), then this logic of reason is to be abandoned.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance: “for the most part Dasein covers up its ownmost Being-towards-death, fleeing in the face of it” (*Being* 295).

also point towards is that the origins of Heidegger's ideas about poetry's relation to care are worth investigating, and that turning now to the nineteenth-century works of Ralph Waldo Emerson in order to do so is all the more pertinent that he holds views about the human existence that pertain to a philosophy of perfectionism—all the while writing extensively about what poetry means.

## Chapter Two: Emerson

Do Emerson's works contain the claim that poetry is a manifestation of authentic care? Because the latter concept is a Heideggerian one, the answer to this question cannot be straightforwardly positive. However, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that Emerson's writings on poetry and the arts contain arguments that, when put together and read alongside Heidegger's philosophical ideas, support the view that poetry pertains to and manifests authentic care. Reading Emerson's works in light of Heidegger's is also a way of investigating whether the arguments put forward in Chapter One help to understand better, or to reveal, some of the philosophical implications of Emerson's ideas about poetry. Demonstrating that this is the case will not only prove the relevance and usefulness of the concept of care for the critical literary analysis of Emerson's works, it will also suggest that the idea that poetry can manifest authentic care has a history, and that some of the origins of Heidegger's views can be traced back to Emerson's texts. This chapter therefore ascertains whether Emerson's writings fit in the theoretical framework set out in Chapter One, including by asking questions such as: does poetry also have something to do, in Emerson's works, both with what things are and with who or how we are, and if so, does this ontological connection have something to do with a respectful kind of attentiveness, i.e. authentic care?

In order to answer questions such as this one, this chapter does not approach Emerson's texts the way it did Heidegger's; that is to say, I do not attempt to map out Emerson's ideas through exegetic work. One of the reasons for this is that Emerson's work is more literary and peripatetic than Heidegger's; it does not contain a systematic philosophical analysis with a visible architecture and a coherence comparable to the one of *Being and Time*. Instead of trying to duplicate the approach used with Heidegger's work, I therefore explore Emerson's thoughts on poetry and the arts alongside Heidegger's, and I focus on the areas where their ideas overlap. Another reason for adopting this strategy is that Stanley Cavell has previously suggested that doing this might be worthwhile; in "Thinking of Emerson" he thus writes: "'For questioning is the piety of thinking.' In the right mood, if you lay beside this [sentence by Heidegger] a sentence of Emerson's from 'Intellect' that says, 'Always our thinking is a pious reception,' you might well pause a moment. And if one starts digging to test how deep the connection might run, I find that



one can become quite alarmed" (*The Senses* 131). Without becoming "quite alarmed," and without having the ambition of fathoming "how deep" the connection between Emerson and Heidegger is, I demonstrate in this chapter that prospecting or, as Stanley Cavell puts it, "digging" into Emerson's writings on poetry yields profitable insights into the ways in which, for the nineteenth-century thinker as for Heidegger, poetry is both the consequence and the cause of a kind of care that is phenomenologically and ontologically enriching. In other words, this chapter argues, on the one hand, that for both thinkers poetry occurs as a result—and is an expression or manifestation—of a relation to the world characterised by care; poetry is the consequence of a caring behaviour or way of being. On the other hand, I argue that what poetry causes—its potential effects—pertains to care insofar as poetry provides a pathway towards, and is an example of, a way of relating to the world and to words characterised by authentic care.

What this chapter studies is thus, to use Emerson's words, the ways in which poetry is the result of an earnest attentiveness and "plainness" (*Essays* 465) by which the poet "comes one step nearer" to things (*Essays* 456), "resigning himself" (*Essays* 459) through an "abandonment to the nature of things" (*Essays* 459). I explore how, according to Emerson, poetry opens eyes and teaches (*Letters* 68), why "the poet says nothing but what helps somebody" (*Letters* 37) and how "[h]e unlocks our chains" (*Essays* 463). Among the claims investigated are also Emerson's views that "[t]he poet is representative" (*Essays* 448), and "the fundamental, the manly man" (*Letters* 26) who "sees and reports the truth" (*Letters* 26) and "lets them [other men], by his song, into some of the realities" (*Letters* 38). What such statements make apparent is that asking whether, for Emerson, the causes and consequences of poetry are of a caring kind involves, as with Heidegger in Chapter One, ascertaining whether the phenomenology of poetry is connected to ontology—that is to say, whether the poetic experience discloses something both about human beings and about what things are. It is therefore worth beginning to explore the meaning of statements such as the ones above, their similarities with Heidegger's words, and the limitations of such comparisons, by looking into the relationship Emerson considers poetry and poets to have with things, and determining whether some form caring—or even dwelling—lies at its centre.

## 1. Poetry and Things

I will begin this chapter's demonstration that Emerson's ideas fit Heidegger's framework by first showing how, for the American thinker like for the German philosopher, poets dwell, let us dwell, and disclose what a thing is (its Being) by paying careful and close attention to it and tarrying in proximity with it. Emerson indeed writes in his essay "Poetry and Imagination" that "Poetry is the perpetual endeavour to express the spirit of the thing" (*Letters* 17). Even though Emerson's sentence and his use of the word "spirit" pertain to a form of idealism which is absent from Heidegger's writings, both the American and the German thinkers write that poetry communicates something fundamental about what a thing is—its spirit or Being. In other words, even though both authors disagree on what that fundamental something is, they concur on the idea that poetry expresses it. Emerson thus claims that the poet "sees and reports the truth" (*Letters* 26) and "lets them, [other men] by his song, into some of the realities" (*Letters* 38). The "truth" and "realities" that Emerson mentions are of an ideal, even spiritual nature, and those are claims that Heidegger does not make; nevertheless, both authors share the idea that poetry discloses what things are—'really' and 'truly' according to Emerson, more so 'worldly', 'phenomenologically' or 'fourfoldedly' according to Heidegger. What poetry achieves, according to both authors, is not an imaginative embellishment, interpretation, or addition to what something is, but the manifestation and disclosure of that thing's relation to and place in the world. Thus, just as for Heidegger poetry says what something is by disclosing the way it gathers the fourfold and by unfolding its world, for Emerson "the poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession," as he writes in "The Poet" (*Essays* 456). The following words describing Emerson's views and written by David M. Robinson in *Emerson and the Conduct of Life* therefore also make sense in a Heideggerian framework: "Poetic knowledge is thus the pursuit of the larger contextual pattern that will make sense of an individual object by demonstrating its relation to the whole" (192). Robinson continues his description of Emerson's views—as expressed in the latter's essay "Poetry and Imagination" in particular—by contrasting what poetry achieves with what science does, or rather, what it undoes:

This pervasive unity suggests the limits of the empirical method of science, which attempts to isolate a phenomenon rather than find its larger context and is therefore "false by being unpoetical". . . . Poetic knowing, which is fundamentally a recognition that perception is connection, strives not to isolate objects from each other or the object of perception from the perceiving subject. (192)

As this investigation previously pointed out, Heidegger's work and interest in poetry also goes together with a criticism of a calculating, scientific "logic of the mind," of its de-contextualising abstraction and of its ontological claims based on objectivity and substance. Robinson's words about how poetry tries not to separate objects from each other or from the subject could thus apply to a description of Heidegger's views—with the exception that Heidegger sought to stop making subject-object distinctions altogether. Heidegger's writings operate a deconstruction of subject-object and spiritual-material dichotomies so as to point towards more phenomenological, fundamental or authentic ways of being in the world, whereas Emerson attempts to reconcile the two. According to the latter, poetry has an explicitly spiritual meaningfulness to it in that it can reveal the spiritual dimension of the material world and the intertwining of mind and matter. In spite of this difference between both thinkers, Emerson's idea that poetry makes sense of the world by showing the purpose, organisation or trajectory of things as well as their truth or spirit anticipates several of Heidegger's ideas, particular those expressed in his later writings.

For Emerson like for Heidegger, poetry is thus ontologically significant insofar as it speaks of what things are, of their meanings for us, of how they—and us—are connected; i.e. poetry contains, discloses and conveys understandings of what we, things, and the world as a meaningful whole, *are*. According to Emerson, these understandings, relationships and meanings are like a layer of meaning, or even a sense without which the experience of reality is impoverished. For example, when trying to get somebody to get a sense of what an encounter with a particular rose feels like, or when trying to convey that rose's Being, showing that person a photograph of that rose, or describing only what it *looks* like is useful, but stimulating or speaking to one sense only will not convey a complete experience nor a true understanding of what that rose is. Its scent and thorns, and the subsequent caution that is required for that pleasant olfactory experience not to be tinged by a painful tactile one, are also part of that experience and of what that rose *is*. Such information is not only phenomenologically important, an understanding of what the rose is that does not include this information is poorer. Poetry, like those senses of touch and smell, is ontologically enriching; choosing to discard the phenomenological wealth that poetry provides means settling for ontological paucity. Emerson thus writes that "True genius will not impoverish, but will liberate, and add new senses. If a wise man should appear in our village, he would create, in those who conversed with him, a new consciousness of wealth, by opening their eyes to unobserved advantages" (*Essays* 623).

Even though these words are not explicitly about poets, *Representative Men*, from which this passage is taken, includes chapters such as “Shakespeare; or, the Poet” and “Goethe; or, the Writer,” which suggests that poetry, as the work of “genius,” creates the kind of eye-opening “new consciousness of wealth” Emerson describes. In another work, *Nature*, he likewise puts forward the idea that there is a paucity, in our outlook, that needs to be addressed: “The ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things” (*Essays* 47). In contrast to this “ruin,” according to Emerson the poet’s experience of things is fuller, phenomenologically richer and completely “coincident” with what they truly are, which is why poets can convey, through poetry, what things genuinely are: “the poet names the thing because he sees it, or comes one step nearer to it than any other,” Emerson writes in his essay “The Poet” (*Essays* 457). In this sentence, Emerson links naming the thing, that is to say, finding the word that best conveys what it is—that pinpoints its Being—with stepping nearer to it, experiencing it up close, which entails looking at it more carefully. As is the case with Heidegger’s work, this sentence, together with the previous ones, connects poetry, ontology, and phenomenology, all the while suggesting that what characterises poetry is a careful approach to and a proximity with things. This careful attentiveness and what causes or allows poetry to happen now calls for further attention.

The way Emerson describes the poet’s coming nearer to things indicates that—for him as for Heidegger—poetry pays respectful attention to things through a kind of letting-be and a receptiveness: in “The Poet” Emerson thus writes of a “plainness” (*Essays* 465) by which the poet “stands one step nearer to things,” (*Essays* 456) “resigning himself” (*Essays* 459) through an “abandonment to the nature of things” (*Essays* 459). Such careful attentiveness towards the Being or “nature” of things is not only akin to Heidegger’s notion of authentic care, Emerson’s idea of an “abandonment” or “resigning” brings the two authors even closer. Just as Heidegger writes of the poet being “without care” (*Poetry* 117) or “outside all caring” (*Poetry* 118) because their relationship to things is not characterised by concern,<sup>32</sup> Emerson writes of the poet that while “others be distracted with cares, he is exempt,” (*Letters* 37). For both thinkers, the poet thus speaks “with the intellect released

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger indeed explains that “caring here has the character of purposeful self-assertion by the ways and means of unconditional production. We are without such care only when we do not establish our nature exclusively within the precinct of production and procurement, of things that can be utilized and defended” (*Poetry*, 117-8).

from all service,” Emerson writes in “The Poet” (*Essays* 459). In other words, instead of being busied with or preoccupied by things, the poet simply lets them be. This in turn means that their work, their disclosure of what things are, is not interventionist—it is neither a dissection nor a manufacturing. The poet’s abandonment and resigning indicate that they do not so much speak as lend their voice to things; provided they surrenders to things, they are letting them speak through them rather than giving us their opinion or point of view on those things. This does not mean that the poet’s speaking is objective as oppose to subjective, rather, the truth that the poet “sees and reports” (*Letters* 26) is that of the ways in which we and nature, or mind and matter, are one and intertwined. Moreover, just as in Heidegger’s works the poet’s way of being, characterised by dwelling, stands in contrast to the one characteristic of everydayness and its never tarrying alongside things, Emerson is critical of our nonpoetic relationships to things. “We do not with sufficient plainness or sufficient profoundness address ourselves to life,” he thus argues in “The Poet” (*Essays* 465) while, conversely, he writes in *Nature* that “[t]he invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common,” (*Essays* 47).

Another characteristic which is common to Heidegger and Emerson’s figures of the poet, and which is linked to the above, is the way in which, unlike certain scientific undertakings, poetry does not isolate, reduce or render abstract. In *Nature* Emerson thus writes:

Empirical science is apt to cloud the sight, and, by the very knowledge of functions and processes, to bereave the student of the manly contemplation of the whole. The savant becomes unpoetic. But the best read naturalist who lends an entire and devout attention to truth, will see that there remains much to learn of his relation to the world, and that it is not to be learned by any addition or subtraction or other comparison of known quantities. . . . (*Essays* 43)

Emerson pitches the contemplation of “the whole” against a quest for “knowledge” of isolated parts, and the fact that he is critical of the latter—by calling it “unpoetic”—further indicates what the poet sees and conveys is that “whole” as well as a “congruity” that science “overlooks”: “Nor has science sufficient humanity, so long as the naturalist overlooks that wonderful congruity which subsists between man and the world . . .” (*Essays* 44). Moreover, to the above process of subtraction or disintegration, Emerson opposes the poet’s ability to encompass or, as he puts it in another passage from *Nature*, to “integrate”: “There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet” (*Essay*, 9). Poetry is therefore the consequence of a particular way

of seeing, according to Emerson, one that is both carefully attentive, in that the poet is close to things, but also one which is overarching and all-encompassing. The poet also stands near things and looks at them carefully in a way that is plain, contemplative, and receptive, without acting upon them in ways that would attempt to understand the functions of their parts. Unlike the empirical scientist who looks at the cut-up part of something through a microscope, the poet respects a thing's essence, nature or spirit and this attentive nearness is paired with an awareness of the context, environment, landscape or world in which that thing belongs. One of Emerson's own poems contains lines that further evidence this last point: in "Each and All," which I discuss in more detail towards the end of this chapter, the speaker is at first unsatisfied after having "brought" (*Poems* 5) or "fetched" (*Poems* 5) things in nature because, out of context those "things / Had left their beauty on the shore" (*Poems* 5) given that, as the speaker puts it, "I did not bring home the river and sky" (*Poems* 5). By contrast, towards the end of the poem, in the woods, the speaker receptively "inhaled" (*Poems* 5), "saw" and "heard" (*Poems* 6) the surrounding, letting the ground-pine curl and run (*Poems* 5). The result, the speaker says, is that "[b]eauty through my senses stole" (*Poems* 6). Having been acutely sensitive to everything "beneath" (*Poems* 5), "around" and "over" (*Poems* 6), the speaker concludes the poem with the following line: "I yielded myself to the perfect whole" (*Poems* 6). The poet's proximity to things is thus contextualised and inclusive, while their attentiveness is a receptive surrender.

In addition to these aspects, for Emerson like for Heidegger, the poet's relationship to things—characterised by attentive proximity—is described using metaphors that have to do with the heart. Both authors oppose the distance of scientific stances to the heart-felt nearness and interiority of poetic ones. In "What Are Poets For?," Heidegger argues, as pointed out in Chapter One of this investigation, that poetry manifests a "logic of the heart" (*Poetry* 125) and, to develop his argument, he quotes Rainer Maria Rilke referring to that same part of the body in the last lines of his ninth elegy: "Existence beyond number/wells up in my heart" (*Poetry* 125). In *Emerson's Angle of Vision*, Sherman Paul points out that Emerson's views are likewise inspired by a poet, particularly regarding how "words . . . had to elicit the total response which Edwards had rightly called 'the sense of the heart'" (130). What he exactly means in speaking of heart-felt relationships, Paul explains as follows, quoting from Emerson's essay "The Over-Soul":

"The great distinction", he [Emerson] wrote, "between teachers sacred or literary, – between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope, – between philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart, – between men of the world . . . and here and there a fervent mystic . . . - is that one class speak *from within*, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class, *from without*, as spectators merely" (C, II, 287). What Emerson meant by the affirmative principle was this vision or insight permitting men, like Jesus, to speak "from within the veil, where the word is one with what it tells of" (C, II, 287). Like Edwards nearly a century earlier, he asked men not only to entertain ideas intellectually but to realize them vitally with a sense of the heart. (12-3)

Like Heidegger, Emerson thus uses the image of the heart to illustrate the idea of a proximate, inner relationship to things, and to characterise poetry that speaks of a genuine experience of things—whereby one is touched and affected, including emotionally, by things. Like Heidegger, Emerson makes a qualitative distinction between poets, preferring those whose proximity to things has gone to the point of appropriation, or even, incorporation—whereby nearness goes to the point of taking things in. This point corresponds, as Paul points out above, to one where word and thing are one ("where the word is one with what it tells of"); that is to say, the most adequate and respectful expression of what something is entails a dwelling with that goes as far as letting it enter one's inner self or heart. For both Emerson and Heidegger, tarrying with things to the point of incorporating in one's heart is like planting a seed that one cultivates—that is how one lets them express their being and flourish, as opposed to looking at them from a distance, with a calculating mind's eye or by dissecting them under a microscope. As Paul further explains, while "In its narrow sense, intellect or mind was the faculty of analysis, separating the subject from its object; but affection, the power of the heart, as Emerson said, 'blends', joining the perceiver and the thing perceived" (128). Paul further points out the lack of spiritual intimacy as one of the reason for Emerson's criticism of scientific materialism: "The science of the seventeenth century was still moral, ethical, imaginative—in an Emersonian word, poetic; that of the eighteenth searched piecemeal into a nature no longer spiritually intimate with man" (15). This intimacy is achieved notably through the aforementioned "abandonment to the nature of things," particularly as in that same sentence from "The Poet," Emerson describes the poet as "unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him" (*Essays* 459). The poet's heartfelt relationship to things thus comes with the opposite of a quest for control or dominion; instead, they take the risk of letting things affect them in their very heart and are therefore characterised by a vulnerability and what Emerson describes in *Nature* as an "entire humility" (*Essays* 43). In doing so, the poet sets an example, and their words are like an

invitation and a bridge towards a similar, poet-like outlook and way of being. How, according to Emerson, this is achieved—that is to say, how poets and poetry not only care for things but also for other people by showing them both the means and the benefits of a deeper relationship to things—now calls for further attention.

## 2. Poetry's Care for People

The idea that changes in language can change people and how they understand the world is present in Emerson's essays in the following way according to Paul: "Emerson . . . desired: the regeneration of language, and, through language as the conveyancing of reality, of men" (130). What changes in people can poetry bring about, according to Emerson, and how? So as to begin answering this question, it is useful to point out that just as, in "What Are Poets For?" Heidegger describes poetry as "outside all caring" (*Poetry* 118) in the sense of concerned preoccupation, Emerson finds that poetry takes people beyond tedious daily cares. Quoting Emerson's Journals, John Q. Anderson suggests in *The Liberating Gods: Emerson on Poets and Poetry* that there is a parallel between the poet's role and the way in which death stirs our thirst for the poetic:

In this humanitarian role that the poet performs for his fellowmen, the poet frees men from the prison house of their everyday thoughts. Men, Emerson contends, are "On the brink of the waters of life and truth" (*Works*, III, 33), but cannot reach them. They are prone to live timidly in their old thoughts and not reach out for new ones. "The only poetic fact in the life of thousands and thousands," Emerson laments, "is their death. No wonder they specify all the circumstances of the death of another person" (*Journals*, IV, 230). (39)

Emerson's idea that death is a "poetic fact," an event that points towards what lies beyond "the prison house of . . . everyday thoughts," as Anderson put it, stresses the importance and "humanitarian role" of the poet. As custodians of the domain to which death belongs—the poetic—poets care for the living in offering a way of accessing "the waters of life and truth." Regardless of what exactly that truth is, the implication of Emerson's idea is that without poets and poetry people would be left on the dry and barren shores of a purely scientific and materialistic stance towards death. This is an idea Heidegger also develops in "What Are Poets For?" where he quotes one of Rilke's letters stressing the possibility "'to read the word 'death' *without* negation'" (*Poetry* 122). In his essays discussing poetry, Emerson does not write about death as much as Heidegger does, however—or rather, he makes more general statements that are just as much about death as they are about life as a whole.



In "The Poet" Emerson thus writes that "poets are liberating gods" (*Essays* 462), that the poet "unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene" (*Essays* 463) after which "we are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air" (*Essays* 461). This image borrowed from Plato not only suggests a liberation from the shackles of everyday cares and thoughts, from our usual, concerned way of caring. It also means that poets introduce us to our true or fundamental selves. Indeed, in "The Poet" Emerson writes that "the poet is representative" (*Essays* 448), and that "he is the healthy, the wise, the fundamental, the manly man" (*Letters* 26), as he puts it in "Poetry and the Imagination." There is an idealistic, Romantic, and almost nostalgic side to this idea in Emerson's works, a claim that poetry can change or restore people to who or what they more genuinely and originally were: god-like figures. "A man is a god in ruins. . . . Man is the dwarf of himself. . . . Out of him sprang the sun and moon" (*Essays* 45-6) Emerson indeed writes in *Nature*, and poetry points towards this lost past, giving us a taste or glimpse of this divinity. Such metaphors urge us to embrace the poet's heartfelt, inner perspective, arguing that deepening our relationships to things in such a way amounts to reclaiming a natural and fundamental way of being that is both interpretative and creative. Emerson thus begins *Nature* by arguing the following: "The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?" (*Essays* 7). The idea that Emerson develops here is one he goes back to at the end of his essay, arguing that poetry, and the way of being it involves, is what can allow us to recover this "original relation to the universe." The reason poetry cures our dwarfing, ruining or blindness, is precisely because it affects us, and has us experience things the way the poet does, through a heartfelt staying close that goes to the point of taking things in. Thus, while "[t]o our blindness . . . things seem unaffecting," as Emerson writes in *Nature* (*Essays* 48), the poet's heartfelt attention to things makes them a seer of what they truly are. The words of a poem can therefore cure our blindness if and when they draw our attention to things and have us tarry with them in a way that teaches us to see beyond the surface of the matter-of-fact and to let them affect us. "To the wise, therefore, a fact is true poetry, and the most beautiful of fables," Emerson continues (*Essays* 48); the poets sees such miracles and conveys this wisdom in their poems that help us see like them and learn from them. This idea that poetry may cure an infirmity means that through the poetic experience not only

are things more genuinely what they truly, wholly are, but so are humans, particularly as their senses, hearts and minds are all affected and involved. This genuineness and completeness of both thing and human through poetry means that poetry cares, developing creative, enriching ways of living, of relating to reality, of dwelling and building. Just as the poet “builds . . . and affirms,” (*Letters* 37) as Emerson puts it in “Poetry and the Imagination,” humans are to make sense of the world, to creatively interact with it, and—instead of living in accordance with convention—to live in the way of being poetry both requires and fosters. “Build, therefore, your own world,” Emerson thus urges in the concluding paragraph of *Nature* (*Essays* 48).

What this idea of building one’s world and of adopting poetry’s way of being means for Emerson is worth discussing in further detail, especially since there are other passages where Emerson is less optimistic regarding what poetry can achieve. In *Representative Men* he thus writes: “Reason, the prized reality, the Law, is apprehended now and then for a serene and profound moment amidst the hubbub of cares and works which have no direct bearing on it;—is then lost, for months or years, and again found, for an interval, to be lost again. If we compute it in time, we may, in fifty years, have half a dozen reasonable hours. But what are these cares and works the better?” (*Essays* 705). Even though this passage from the chapter on “Montaigne; or, the Skeptic” is about “reason” rather than poetic insight or mystical revelation, it is clear that the uplifting benefits poetry provides cannot be maintained perpetually. “I tumble down again into my old nooks” Emerson adds in “The Poet” (*Essays* 452). Even though this happens most of the time and “common sense resumes its tyranny” (*Essays* 704) as Emerson puts it in *Representative Men*, poetry has the power to determine the general direction of our whereabouts and, occasionally, to let us see where we are going “amidst the hubbub of cares and works” mentioned above. As Anderson puts it, the poet “acts as the ‘liberating god’ who frees men from the prison of their everyday thoughts” (32). The poet is able to do this because poetry, through words and our imagination, is to some extent part of our everyday lives, whether we are aware of it or not. That is to say, just as, according to Heidegger, we cannot but care—albeit inauthentically most of the time—because, fundamentally, we are caring beings, Emerson argues in “The Poet” that deep down, we “are all poets and mystics”:

See the power of national emblems. Some stars, lilies, leopards, a crescent, a lion, an eagle, or other figure which came into credit God knows how, on an old rag of bunting, blowing in the wind on a fort at the ends of the earth, shall make the blood tingle under the rudest or

the most conventional exterior. The people fancy they hate poetry, and they are all poets and mystics! (*Essays* 454)

This deeply poetic nature of ours not only explains, according to Emerson, what steers men across oceans, founds nations, builds temples and pyramids; it also explains why, according to him, poetry can be a powerful tool and a compass or level to drive individual lives out their blindness and beyond the aforementioned tyranny of common sense. In other words, because poetry—in the very broad sense the above passage refers to—is part of us, poems and poesy have the power to influence both individual and collective behaviours and existences, instilling them, albeit occasionally, with reverence, sensitivity, attentiveness, and creativity. In “Prudence,” Emerson thus writes that “Poets should be lawgivers; that is, the boldest lyric inspiration should not chide and insult, but should announce and lead the civil code and the day’s work” (*Essays* 362). This further indicates that Emerson’s figure of the poet manifests, through their work, what Heidegger calls authentic solicitude since the latter “helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it” (*Being* 159) as he explains in *Being and Time*.<sup>33</sup> As the explicit expression of who we fundamentally are without being aware of it (“poets and mystics”), poetry has the potential to awaken a person to their fundamental Being and reveal the latter—even though few poets are gifted enough to be able to do so. Everyday ways of thinking, seeing, and behaving resume their “tyranny” after a short while and who we fundamentally are gets lost out of sight again, but poetry nevertheless has the power of speaking to our true selves, of revealing it to us, so that we may be who we genuinely are, even if only temporarily.

One of the ways in which poetry does this, Emerson argues, is by exploring the confines of the human condition—a kind of spanning or measuring of existence—in a way that teaches or instructs. Emerson for instance writes the following about Shakespeare:

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<sup>33</sup> Emerson’s poet is therefore also a figure of what Heidegger calls resoluteness: “Dasein’s resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it ‘be’ in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (*Being* 344). As mentioned in the concluding part of Chapter One, this notion of the resolute self has political undertones which have been interpreted in various—including problematic—ways. Given the parallels I am pointing out between Heidegger’s ideas and Emerson’s, the political views surrounding the latter’s elitist description of the poet (particularly his idea that poets should be “lawgivers” who “announce and lead the civil code and the day’s work”) might consequently also leave room for problematic interpretations. The scope of this study prevents it from investigating this question further; I simply make this point so as to highlight that this overlap between Emerson and Heidegger’s ideas complicates oversimplified descriptions of the latter as a Nazi and of the former as a champion of democracy.

What point of morals of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office or function, or district of man's work, has he not remembered? What king has he not taught state, as Talma taught Napoleon? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What lover has he not outloved? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behavior? (*Essays* 721)

This idea that Shakespeare can instruct us and make us see who we truly are further supports the idea that poetry reveals the true nature or being of things: "This power of expression, or of transferring the inmost truth of things into music and verse, makes him [Shakespeare] the type of the poet," Emerson continues (*Essays* 723). The poet sees, feels, and understands reality more fully and genuinely, so that their poems and the worlds they 'build' in art are a transfer, a conveying of this truth that can guide and instruct other people. Summarising Emerson's view on this point, Anderson therefore writes: "The glory that was Greece, for example, lives not in the works of historians, but in the poems of Homer. Elizabethan England is not truly revealed in the works of historians but in the poetry of Shakespeare" (33). These words not only stress the poet's ability to instruct, they also point out poetry's ontological importance given how poetry can help us understand aspects of the Being of things that scientific or historical lists of facts cannot convey. This guidance, this capacity to instruct is why Emerson writes of Shakespeare that he "planted the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into Chaos" (*Essays* 725). That poetry should be eye opening is moreover clearly stated by Emerson in the following extract from "Circles" in which the association of "sonnet" and "play" suggests that, here too, he has Shakespeare in mind when writing about "the poet":

Therefore we value the poet. All the argument and all the wisdom is not in the encyclopaedia, or the treatise on metaphysics, or the Body of Divinity, but in the sonnet or the play. . . . He smites and arouses me with his shrill tones, breaks up my whole chain of habits, *and I open my eye on my own possibilities*. He claps wings to the sides of all the solid old lumber of the world, *and I am capable once more of choosing a straight path in theory and practice*. (*Essays* 409, emphases added)

The value of poetry lies, Emerson tells us again in this passage, in the fact that it helps us become aware of who we fundamentally are—i.e. "poets and mystics" who are capable of more than what the materialism of everydayness suggests. The poet "smites and arouses" us all the while conveying their knowledge or wisdom because they manage to put into words their experience, which is both heartfelt and insightful, i.e. emotional and intellectual—like their poetry, hence its smiting and arousing. Poetry thereby allows us to realise that we can have phenomenologically fuller and closer relationship to things that

will reveal their ontological wealth, and when we adopt this relationship, this way of being, then we, like the poet, are true to who we genuinely are.

There are significant limitations, however, to the extent to which poetry cares for people in the way described so far. Indeed, Emerson expresses frustration at how few truly gifted poets there are: “I look in vain for the poet whom I describe,” he admits in “The Poet” (*Essays* 465).<sup>34</sup> From a less personal, more global perspective, he likewise writes in *Representative Men* that “the world still wants its poet-priest” (*Essays* 726) and explains that the process of the rise and disappearance of geniuses is constantly renewed, perfected and adjusted to local and contemporary contexts. In the chapter of *Representative Men* devoted to Goethe, Emerson thus argues, about “the writer,” that “there have been times when he was a sacred person” (*Essays* 750) and that “every word was true, and woke the nations to new life” (*Essays* 750). Another parallel can be drawn with Heidegger on this point insofar as, just as Emerson praises Shakespeare, Heidegger also praises Hölderlin and considered him a crucial, epochal poet.<sup>35</sup> In the nineteenth-century context of a rapidly, freely, and somewhat chaotically developing United States of America both under the influence of—and strongly rejecting—various aspects of European politics and cultures, Emerson seeks and hopes for the creative insights, instruction and guidance of a genius-poet. He wishes that in his day and age some poet will, like Shakespeare did, plant “the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into Chaos” (*Essays* 725). Likewise, Heidegger sees in poetry a beacon of hope in the whirlwinds of globalisation, technology, and the growing cultural influence of the United States of America.

Even though Emerson and Heidegger voice local concerns and hopes for their respective nations, there is, in their works, a sense that both the cause and the remedy for the problems that poetry addresses or cares for are of a universal nature. For Emerson for

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<sup>34</sup> See also:

Often it falls that this winged man, who will carry me into the heaven, whirls me into mists, then leaps and frisks about with me as it were from cloud to cloud, still affirming that he is bound heavenward; and I, being myself a novice, am slow in perceiving that he does not know the way into the heavens, and is merely bent that I should admire his skill to rise like a fowl or a flying fish, a little way from the ground or the water; but the all-piercing, all-feeding, and ocular air of heaven that man shall never inhabit. I tumble down again soon into my old nooks, and lead the life of exaggerations as before, and have lost my faith in the possibility of any guide who can lead me thither where I would be (*Essays*, 452).

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger for instance writes about Hölderlin, in “What Are Poets For?”, that “no poet of this world era can overtake him” as he is a “precursor” that is able to accurately describe the “destitute times” that are both our present and future (*Poetry*, 142)

instance, the poet has a child-like innocence and genuineness, meaning that poetry points towards the recovery of a fundamental and universally accessible way of being:

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. (*Essays* 10)

Poetry or its writers are not mentioned in this passage, but given that Emerson's poet, as was previously mentioned, is characterised by a heartfelt relationship to things that lets them affect them, the way Emerson describes the "lover of nature"—whose "heart" and "inward" senses are touched by things—also applies to his figure of the poet, particularly if one thinks of Walt Whitman, whose work Emerson praised. The passage above suggests that poetry expresses—and even invites to recover—a way of being and of relating to things that is innate and almost child-like, but which adulthood, daily cares, and scientific materialism in particular, tend to suppress. This way of being is more precisely what Sherman Paul calls "one's total response to nature": "Science necessarily selects what its further progress requires, but it also eliminates those projections of aspiration and belief, that is, one's total response to nature, that myth and art try to incorporate more fully" (23). Like Emerson's previously quoted words about how "people . . . are all poets and mystics" (*Essays* 454), Paul's words highlight that Emerson, like Heidegger, holds that people originally, spontaneously, and fundamentally engage in a relationship with the world that is just as material as it is imaginative, emotional, and spiritual. Poetry speaks to this need for "projections of aspirations and belief" that Paul mentions; it restores and fosters our natural propensity for emotional and spiritual responses to the world which scientific materialism does not cater for. According to Emerson, America and its people will therefore thrive—locally and individually but also collectively and as a nation—provided they express or manifest a way of being that is universally present and always fundamentally there in them. Poetry, through the work of geniuses, is what will guide them towards this and out of the paucity and detachment of scientific materialism.

Emerson indeed shares with Heidegger the view that both everyday stances and scientific ones are characterised by a paucity that cannot fulfil all human needs, particularly when they dominate one's existence. In part six of *The Conduct of Life*, entitled "Worship," Emerson thus deplores how pervading the materialism of his contemporaries is, arguing that discarding one's heartfelt and spiritual response to nature, by restricting oneself to a

purely material and rational understanding, impoverishes the world by reducing it to matter, and depletes it of what allows a person to feel connected to it:

In our large cities, the population is godless, materialized,—no bond, no fellow-feeling, no enthusiasm. These are not men, but hungers, thirsts, fevers, and appetites walking. How is it people manage to live on,— so aimless as they are? After their peppercorn aims are gained, it seems as if the lime in their bones alone held them together, and not any worthy purpose. . . . There is faith in chemistry, in meat, and wine, in wealth, in machinery, in the steam-engine, galvanic battery, turbine wheels, sewing machines, and in public opinion, but not in divine causes. (*Essays* 1059)

Even though Emerson's words are not about poetry as such but about religion and spirituality, as the title of his essay indicates, his mention of a lack of "bond" and of how "aimless" the population seems points towards poetry as a possible remedy given how the latter constitutes an aforementioned "total response" (Paul 23) that acknowledges and expresses relationships to the world that include emotional and spiritual responses to it. The ways religion and poetry are linked is further explained by Richard Deming in *Listening on All Sides: Towards an Emersonian Ethics of Reading*: "Without the superstructure of a belief in God, a new means of investing in one's world is made necessary. Poetry becomes a replacement of God, as in its negotiations a poem's text is both the creation of a worldview and the way one writes (or reads) oneself into that world by means of poetry's acts of creative, constitutive imagination" (7). Heidegger's essay "What Are Poets For?" moreover starts with a discussion of Hölderlin's idea of destitute times from which gods have disappeared, and most of the essay discusses the role of poets therein. However, an in-depth analysis of Heidegger's arguments or of the biblical—even messianic—nature of the figure of the poet in both Emerson and Heidegger's works are topics beyond the scope of this study.

Even though both authors discuss religious or spiritual matters alongside their views on poetry, and even though both pitch poetic stances against scientific ones, neither Emerson nor Heidegger reject science as such. In fact, science's ability to discover laws in nature is something Emerson both admires and praises. As Anderson notes, "Emerson was not antagonistic to science. On the contrary, he shared the friendly attitude toward scientific investigation common with other writers of the early nineteenth century" (24). Indeed, Emerson sees in science a form of conversation, of recognising similarities between inside and outer worlds, of an indication of the oneness of mind and matter. However, because this dialogue is purely of a rational, logical and mathematical nature, it is

insufficient. Larzer Ziff, in his Introduction to an edition of Emerson's essays, calls this a "partial reunion":

Once upon a time, man was instinct with nature, as the birds and the beasts are instinct with it, and was an inseparable part of it. But with the growth of his understanding—known mythically as the fall of man—he separated from it and looked on matter as a reality foreign to his soul. He attempts a partial reunion with nature when he searches for its laws so that he can manipulate it, but his thoughts he now regards as one thing and nature's mindless processes as another. Soul and matter were not so separated, Emerson affirmed. (17)

Poetry, in contrast to science, allows for a more complete, comprehensive response to nature; it is the flourishing of an intuitive, spontaneous and natural way of relating to the world. Emerson's sentence—partially quoted earlier—about the way science "overlooks that wonderful congruity which subsists between man and the world" thus continues in the following way: "of which he is lord, not because he is the most subtle inhabitant, but because he is its head and heart, and finds something of himself in every great and small thing" (*Essays* 44). This insistence on a sense of connection between self and world, and on a heartfelt—as well as intellectual—relationship, characterises both Emerson's description of how humans universally and instinctively relate to the world, especially in childhood, as well as his description of what poetry implies and fosters. Although the ways in which, according to Emerson, poetry can help or care for people are now clearer, more still needs be discussed regarding how poetry, as an art, achieves this.

### **3. Poetry's Transformative Power**

So as to get a better grasp of how the caring consequences of poetry can come about, it is necessary to understand more precisely how and why, according to Emerson, a poem reconnects a person and the world through the heart. In order to do so, it is worth first taking a look at what the American thinker writes about art in general. In an essay entitled "Art", he argues that "historically viewed, it has been the office of art to educate the perception of beauty. We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision. It needs, by the exhibition of single traits, to assist and lead the dormant taste" (*Essays* 432). As one of the arts, poetry therefore also has an educational role according to Emerson, one which opens the eye, makes vision clearer, and awakens. Such an idea is also expressed in Emerson's aforementioned description of the ways in which Shakespeare instructs (*Essays* 721), as well as in the previously cited idea that even though people are taken up in worldly, "peppercorn" cares (*Essays* 1059), poetry can give them wings to rise above these (*Essays* 409) and get a better sense of how things, as a whole, make sense. It is worth



noting that the idea that art, and poetry in particular, should lead the way towards a change or awakening can also be found in Heidegger's works. Commenting on the latter, in *The Gods and Technology: A Reading of Heidegger*, Richard Rojcewicz for instance writes that: "the way to contemplation is paved by art. It is in art that we might find the examples to imitate, the examples of the *poiesis* we need to practice in our apprenticeship. The practice of contemplative thinking . . . will consist in our taking up and practising the poietic attitude we find expressed in art" (228).

Although it is clear that, for Emerson, one of the roles or consequences of poetry is to instruct or educate, what still remains unclear is how art, and poetry in particular, achieves this. In a statement which may at first appear to contradict what was previously said about things and poetry's inclusiveness and contextualisation, Emerson indeed argues—in his essay entitled "Art"—that the artist wakes us and clarifies our vision by "the exhibition of single traits" (*Essays* 432), i.e., by a movement of selection rather than unification. Further down, Emerson even adds: "The virtue of art lies in detachment, in sequestering one object from the embarrassing variety. Until one thing comes out from the connection of things, there can be enjoyment, contemplation, but no thought" (*Essays* 432). What this means is that reading a poem or looking at a painting often involves focusing on something in particular—for example a scene, an object, a person or a moment—and such a singling out, Emerson later explains, enables the entire world to speak through it: "It is the habit of certain minds to give an all-excluding fulness to the object, the thought, the word, they alight upon, and to make that for the time the deputy of the world. These are the artists, the orators, the leaders of society. The power to detach and to magnify by detaching is the essence of rhetoric in the hands of the orator and the poet" (*Essays* 433). This singling out or "detaching" that occurs in poetry as well enables the reader to devote careful attention to an object so that its "fulness," what it truly, essentially and fundamentally is may be expressed—which includes the way in which it belongs to the world and manifests it as its "deputy": "For every object has its roots in central nature, and may of course be so exhibited to us as to represent the world" Emerson writes (*Essays* 433). The reader of a poem—like, for example, someone beholding a still life in an art gallery—thus witnesses a "detaching" or exhibiting that allows this fullness and world-representation to become apparent. This is the way to wake up, assist and train the intellect and senses, as Joseph C. Schöpp explains, quoting Emerson's journals:

He diagnosed an “important defect” in America: “the absence of a general education of the eye” (JMN 13:437). The American eye, both physical and mental, was untrained to see deeper; it was blinded by work and the pursuit of wealth rather than beauty; it was unable to see the splendour, color, and opulence of things. It looked either timidly backward or restlessly forward, but it was not accustomed to see the beauty of the here and now. (35)

The need for the eye to be trained, or educated, that Schöpp points out in this passage, also stems from “[t]he ruin or the blank . . . in our own eye” (*Essays* 47) that Emerson describes in *Nature*, as was discussed earlier. The eye’s inability to focus on the “here and now” explains why we fail to “see the miraculous in the common” (*Essays* 47) and can be remedied by learning to pay careful and close attention to things in “simplicity,” as Emerson explains in the following lines from “The Poet”: “The poorest experience is rich enough for all the purposes of expressing thought. Why covet a knowledge of new facts? Day and night, house and garden, a few books, a few actions, serve us as well as would all trades and all spectacles. We are far from having exhausted the significance of the few symbols we use. We can come to them yet with a terrible simplicity” (*Essays* 455). If one thinks of a still life for example, it is easy to understand what Emerson means when he argues that encountering works of art fosters this simplicity, this focus on what is already there, by selecting a few objects which we ordinarily fail to pay attention to. Details such as the position of the objects chosen, their surroundings and the light that falls onto them, and other such features of the work all contribute to draw attention to, and to reconsider, the significance of the ordinary, all the while containing information about the painter’s world—including, for example, the social and artistic expectations of the time and the painter’s take on the latter. Heidegger—whose essay “On the Essence of Truth” bears the epigraph “the splendour of the simple” (*Basic* 111)—expresses similar ideas, particularly in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” where he describes Van Gogh’s painting of “a pair of peasant shoes” (*Poetry* 32).

Although such comparisons of the poet and the painter are helpful to understand Emerson and Heidegger’s works, particularly since both of them wrote about art as a whole, it is not yet clear how, according to Emerson, reading poetry trains or educates the eye, as mentioned above. How, for instance, does poetry develop one’s ability to see that “the poorest experience is rich enough” (*Essays* 455)? The answer to such a question lies in the fact that it is not only through exposure to a poem’s evocation of particular moments or objects that a careful attention to things is fostered; reading a poem also means encountering a specific set of words, which have been equally carefully selected. It is by

reading these words—through the images and sounds they produce—that wealth of a particular experience and the significance of a specific object or moment are conveyed. That is to say, because the words of a poem create an immersive set of sensations, they are what lets readers enter the world, as Emerson puts it in one of his Journals quoted by Sherman Paul in the following passage—the end of which was briefly discussed earlier:

When he spoke of making the word one with the thing, he meant that the word had to follow a perception of the thing, and had, as the vehicle of that perception, to evoke the sensuously felt image of the thing in the mind. Words had not only to be intellectually entertained, they had to be felt, they had to elicit the total response which Edwards had rightly called “the sense of the heart” (J, IV, 169-170; IV, 29). It was in this way that “a good word lets us into the world” (J, IX, 88) (130).

What this passage helps to understand is that words are a bridge between people and things according to Emerson; by speaking *to* the senses and emotions—as well as to the mind—they speak *of* our experience of the world and things. Moreover, not only does the poem draw attention to—and help the reader become aware of—the ways in which we fundamentally and phenomenologically relate to the world, it also conveys the poet’s caring relationship to things. The latter occurs because poetry stands in contrast to our daily use of words. Indeed, just as we are usually taken up by our daily “hubbub of cares” (*Essays* 705), so too do we usually not pay close attention to the words we use and to their sensuous and emotional power. Thus, by bringing our attention to words, poetry invites us to think about how we read ourselves into the world—which is why poetry offers a kind of substitute for religion, as Richard Deming was previously quoted pointing out (7). In this respect, reading a poem offers an opportunity to think about our responses to the human condition and to the silence that surrounds our wordy—and worldly—existences, because “[t]he ‘wise silence’, Emerson implies, cannot be discerned over the din of routine,” as D.M. Robinson points out (33).

While Emerson’s previously quoted words about Shakespeare indicate that poetry instructs—informing us about the world, ourselves, things, and how we relate to them—his words about art make it clear that reading a poem also educates or trains us by providing an experience that introduces us to a way of being that is relevant and applicable beyond the poem. Poetry thereby fosters, and invites readers to have, a richer experience of things, a “clear vision” (*Essays* 432) of the world’s wealth. In “Poetry and the Imagination,” Emerson therefore writes that “[t]he supreme value of poetry is to educate us to a height beyond itself . . .” (*Letters* 65). Even though his statement is about “subduing mankind to

order and virtue" (*Letters* 65-6), it is a clear indication that what is at stake in, through, and beyond poetry is a way of being, of relating to the world, people, and things. This way of being is described in more detail—in terms of letting-be—in *The Conduct of Life*, and more specifically in the aforementioned part six, entitled "Worship," where Emerson writes:

There is a principle which is the basis of things, which all speech aims to say, and all action to evolve, a simple, quiet, undescribed, undescribable presence, dwelling very peacefully in us, our rightful lord: we are not to do, but to let do; not to work, but to let be worked upon; and to this homage there is a consent of all thoughtful and just men in all ages and conditions. To this sentiment belong vast and sudden enlargements of power. (*Essays* 1061)

The spiritual ideas expressed here according to which "we are to let do; not to work, but to let be worked upon" coincide with the poet's "resigning himself," (*Essays* 459) through an "abandonment to the nature of things" (*Essays* 459). This, together with the fact that the above passage is taken from a part entitled "Worship," further suggests that, for Emerson, the boundaries between poets and priests, or poesy and prophecy, is a blurry one.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, if one considers that religion and its texts influence, change or direct one's way of being or how one relates to the world and things, then reading poetry has similar effects according to Emerson, particularly given his previously quoted statement about the virtue and order that poetry aims to educate us to (*Letters* 65-6). This latter statement about poetry "subduing mankind" through its educational effects now makes more sense in light of the above extract about letting-do and letting be worked upon: the quest for a mastery and a transformation of the world through science and constant work is to be flipped on its head. It is not nature but humans—with their tendency or desire to master things through work—which are to be subdued, including through poetry's invitation to, and manifestation of, a careful and respectful attention to things, people, words, and the world at large.

Heidegger's idea that poetry and authentic care are characterised by listening and letting-be conveys a similar invitation to subdue, or overcome, converse tendencies, as Stanley Cavell notes: "Emerson's image of clutching and Heidegger's of grasping, emblemize their interpretation of Western conceptualizing as a kind of sublimized

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<sup>36</sup> Emerson moreover associates poets and prophets, or uses them interchangeably, in several essays. For example, in his shorter and less famous essay "Nature" (the sixth in *Essays, Second Series*) he writes: "The poet, the prophet, has a higher value for what he utters than any hearer, and therefore it gets spoken" (*Essays*, 550). In his essay "Compensation," he writes: "Jesus and Shakespeare are fragments of the soul, and by love I conquer and incorporate them in my own conscious domain" (*Essays*, 301). In *Representative Men*, in the chapter on Plato, Emerson also points out how the Greek philosopher "believes that poetry, prophecy, and the high insight, arc from a wisdom of which man is not master . . ." (*Essays*, 643).

violence. . . . The overcoming of this conceptualizing will require the achievement of a form of knowledge both Emerson and Heidegger call reception” (*Conditions* 39). Cavell’s pointing out that this careful attentiveness is a “reception” suggests that poetry’s educational effects do not amount to the possession of a new productive skill, but rather to a letting-go that releases, or restores, innate receptive faculties. Indeed, we are all “poets and mystics” according to Emerson (*Essays* 454), and thus fundamentally capable of the attentive and caring way of being that poets and mystics both manifest, each in their own ways. Prior to the differentiation between poem and prayer, between behaviours and forms of expression that fall into one category or another, lies a way of being that poets, like mystics, invite us to recover. Emerson suggests this not only in the above statement from “Worship” about a “simple, quiet, undescribed, undescribable presence, dwelling very peacefully in us” (*Essays* 1061) but also in *Nature* where he writes that “in the uttermost meaning of the words, thought is devout, and devotion is thought” (*Essays* 47). This is an idea Heidegger also wrote about, such as in Lecture Three of *What Is Called Thinking*, where he writes: “the Old English noun for thought is *thanc* or *thonc*—a thought, a grateful thought, and the expression of such a thought; today it survives in the plural *thanks*. . . . Is thinking a giving of thanks?” (*What* 139).<sup>37</sup>

Having drawn attention to the similarities between poets and mystics, or poetry and worship, that Emerson puts forward in his works, what remains unclear is how a poem can foster *reception* given that it is a *production*. That is to say, how can readers of a poem be invited “not to do” and “not to work” (*Essays* 1061)—terms which are easier to associate with contemplative mysticism than with poetry—given the poet’s creative and productive act of writing? So as to unravel this apparent paradox, it is worth turning to what Emerson writes in *Representative Men*, in the chapter on “Goethe; or, the Writer”: “Nature will be reported. All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river, its channel in the soil” (*Essays* 746). This passage suggests that writers can be compared to rocks scratching mountains, which implies that reading a poem would be akin to observing such scratches; in other words, readers of poetry do not get to experience the product of

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<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in “‘Between’ Poetry and Philosophy: René Char and Martin Heidegger,” Michael Worton claims that “Heidegger was fascinated by the seventeenth-century Pietist notion of *Denken ist Danken* (to think is to thank)” (151); Emerson, as a former pastor and the son of a pastor, may have been influenced by the same seventeenth-century religious sources as Heidegger.

industrious labour, instead they encounter the natural output of innate faculties. Reading a poem therefore does not expose to an example of work but invites, by way of example, “not to work” and to stay in keeping with nature and the order of things to which we have to be subdued. Another passage, this time in “The Poet,” also makes this clear by comparing poetry to leaves coming out of a tree:

Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin. But the poet names the thing because he sees it, or comes one step nearer to it than any other. This expression or naming is not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree. What we call nature is a certain self-regulated motion or change; and nature does all things by her own hands, and does not leave another to baptize her but baptizes herself. (*Essays* 457)

What this extract suggests is that that reading a poem means beholding a natural product which is as intrinsic a part of our way of being as the production of a leaf is to a tree; it is an opportunity to see nature running its course. Poetry therefore opens a window onto our Being—it is a manifestation of who we fundamentally are—just as the leaf is a manifestation of what the tree fundamentally is.

Emerson’s understanding of poetry means that it teaches its readers, by way of example, to walk a fine line—to find a natural balance—between what would be two equally unnatural pitfalls: complete passivity and silence on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the artificial and laborious manufacturing of a work foreign to who one really is. Indeed, in *Representative Men*, Emerson’s statements at the beginning of the section on “Shakespeare, or the Poet,” suggest that poetry allows readers to witness—and to learn from—a way of expressing oneself and a way of being that is not original, but “altogether receptive”: “Great genial power, one would almost say, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive; in letting the world do all, and suffering the spirit of the hour to pass unobstructed through the mind” (*Essays* 711). What readers of poetry as Emerson understands it therefore get to see when enjoying a poem is that it is possible to express oneself without imposing a subjective opinion or point of view on an objectified world, “without the intention of signifying anything” as Pamela J. Schirmeister puts it in *Less Legible Meanings, Between Poetry and Philosophy in the Work of Emerson* (112). What this means is that poetry provides an example of how it is possible to open up meaning, as opposed to closing it off: poetry is a place where one can get a sense of what things are that goes beyond fixed, rigid, objective signification—“beyond the objectifications of representational language” (Schirmeister 112). If poetry provides an example of this, it is

because what readers of poetry witness is an acceptance of the flexibility, or fluidity of language and meanings—unlike when reading the work of mystics which, according to Emerson, are attempts to “nail” the latter one and for all:

Here is the difference betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead. Mysticism consists in the mistake of an accidental and individual symbol for an universal one. . . . The history of hierarchies seems to show that all religious error consisted in making the symbol too stark and solid, and was at last nothing but an excess of the organ of language. (*Essays* 463)

What this passage suggests is that the nature of language itself—as flowing—is also what readers of poetry get to realise by being confronted with how poetry does not attempt to fix meaning once and for all. A poem opens us up to the wealth of meanings that words and our uses of them contain as it is the manifestation of a respectful acknowledgement of this plurality and potential. According to Emerson poetry thus manifests a careful and receptive attentiveness not only to the world, to who we are, and to our relationships to things, but also to language—and more so than any other written text or art form.

What this exploration of Emerson’s ideas on poetry has shown, is that both the causes and the consequences of poetry, that is to say, what it implies as well as its effects, are a fundamental way of being characterised by attentive and respectful care. Moreover, poetry is phenomenologically comprehensive and ontologically wealthy according to Emerson: it requires and fosters an awareness of our rich experience of the world—which includes our emotional and sentimental responses to it—and it consequently yields and testifies to a richer understanding of what things, people, and the world are. As such, poetry cares and manifests a caring way of being and of relating to the world and things which, according to Emerson, stands as an example to learn from and as an alternative to the busied carelessness of everyday behaviour as well as to the narrower, reductive and objectifying stance of scientific materialism. In demonstrating the above, this exploration of Emerson’s texts on poetry has also shown that such ideas anticipate Heidegger’s in many respects, even though the former are expressed in less systematic and more literary ways.

#### **4. Poetry and Ontologies of Dwelling and Departing**

Examining Emerson’s ideas in detail, demonstrating their phenomenological and ontological aspects, and showing how they anticipate several of Heidegger’s views on poetry and care has allowed me to argue that the notion that poetry manifests care

encapsulates both thinkers' ideas on poetry and brings to the fore their philosophical scope. However, this process involved drawing attention to the areas where Emerson and Heidegger's ideas overlap, rather than where they do not. This investigation must therefore take a step back at this stage and discuss the broader philosophical implications of both Emerson's ideas and of their overlap with Heidegger's, including by studying the works of scholars who argue that the two thinkers' works are on divergent trajectories. This will allow this investigation to determine whether the notion that poetry manifests care holds up against such broader assessments of Emerson and Heidegger's works. Indeed, several objections may be levied at this Heideggerian reading of Emerson and its attempt at finding theoretical ground common to both thinkers. For instance, it can be argued that the two thinkers' views cannot be philosophically reconciled because while Heidegger might be viewed as a philosopher advocating a sense of grounding or rootedness in a language, culture, and place, Emerson may be interpreted in a converse way as a peripatetic champion of change, displacement, and movement. Such views and objections must be addressed if this investigation is then to move next to an exploration of some of the origins and legacies of the notion that poetry manifests care.

In the Introduction to her book *On Leaving: A Reading in Emerson*, Branka Arsić thus argues that "in contrast to Heidegger's claim that 'man is that inability to remain and is yet unable to leave his place,' Emerson will come to develop an astoundingly complex philosophy of leaving, culminating in the existential and ethical insistence that man has to be able to find the power to do what he is unable to do: to leave his place" (3). Arsić thereby suggests that Heidegger's philosophy is incompatible with Emerson's "ontology of leaving" (5) and his call "to abandon the stationary" (3). It is worth dwelling on her understanding of Emerson's works, not only because she acknowledges, as above, the "complex philosophy" in them, but also because her arguments will prove useful to demonstrate how the concept of care is central to the overlap of both thinkers' arguments about what is at stake in poetry. Before taking a closer look at what Arsić means when she claims that Emerson develops an "ontology" and a "philosophy" of "leaving," it is pointing out in mind that Stanley Cavell shares a similar view and also claims that Heidegger and Emerson are opposed on the question of mobility. At the very end of his essay entitled "Thinking of Emerson," published in *The Senses of Walden*, he thus writes: "The substantive disagreement with Heidegger, shared by Emerson and Thoreau, is that the achievement of the human requires not inhabitation and settlement but abandonment, leaving" (*The*



*Senses* 138). The idea that Emerson should advocate “leaving” is not, however, immediately obvious, particularly since, in *Self-Reliance*, Emerson criticises travelling: “let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause,” (*Essays* 272) he writes. Later in this same essay, Emerson adds: “The soul is no traveller; the wise man stays at home,” (*Essays* 277) as well as “[t]ravelling is a fool's paradise . . . But the rage of traveling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness affecting the whole intellectual action. The intellect is vagabond, and our system of education fosters restlessness” (*Essays* 278). Arsić is aware that, given such statements, Emerson can be read in an opposite way—as a thinker of immobility—and that other scholars have defended this view; about her reading of Emerson as a thinker advocating leaving, she thus writes:

Such an idea was no obvious to all of Emerson's readers. In 1898 John Jay Chapman published an important essay diagnosing Emerson to be a thinker of immobility: “He is probably the last great writer to look at life from a stationary standpoint.” In Chapman's account nothing in Emerson's philosophy moves; the world is stable, nature is fixed, and persons don't grow and develop, are never in transition. . . . (6)

Similarly, even though it is possible to read Heidegger as a “thinker of immobility,” I find that reading him in the opposite way is not only justifiable but that, as with Arsić's reading of Emerson, it yields an understanding of his philosophy that is more respectful of its complexity. Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei for instance writes that “[t]he poet is set on a course which never completes its arrival . . . [i]t is in not arriving—being not-at-home—that poetic dwelling is indirectly accomplished” (254). Although I side with Arsić's similar, non-stationary reading of Emerson and will explain how her insights strengthen the philosophical overlap between Emerson and Heidegger's ideas on poetry, the fact that opposite ways of reading both thinkers are possible both highlights the complexity of their writings, and points towards the necessity to go beyond notions of mobility or immobility. I contend below that it is possible to acknowledge the reasons for these oppositions and to use some of the arguments put forward by proponents of both perspectives in order to reach a middle ground—which is precisely the point where I argue Emerson and Heidegger's texts intersect, and where the concept of care proves to be central.

There is, in Emerson's texts, “nothing short of an ontology, the ontology of water,” (4) that is to say, an “ontology of becoming” (5) which, Arsić goes on to explain, means that “nothing *is* but everything *becomes*” (5). Although Heidegger does not express any belief in the “flux of all things,” (5) or how “all things are in flux” (5)—expressions Arsić gets from Emerson's works—the notion that Being is ‘becoming’ or ‘happening’ is also present in the

German philosopher's works,<sup>38</sup> together with the idea that limiting essence to substance is reductive. For Emerson, Being is 'becoming' insofar as permanence is an illusion, just like the apparent motionlessness of the earth, and according to him, humans are constantly running away from the acceptance of impermanence, flux, and transformation. What they seek, try to secure and want to cling on to is an inexistent safety and stability. Arsić points this out when describing Emerson's views on grieving—or sorrow—and laughter:

Usually celebrated as an affirmation of existence, laughter here operates as its negation. . . . In protecting stability, sedateness, and safety, it in fact takes us away from other things that constitute our existence: discontinuity, change, danger, and pain. . . . humans consistently neglect what is happening to them. We either flee from danger and grief, laughing them away, or flee from pleasure, mourning its absence; and we do that because we fear the discontinuity that may result. . . . Both laughter and sorrow are practices of "figuring," "fixing," and stabilizing; they set and protect boundaries, mediate ruptures, minimize changes, and safeguard the restfulness. They are activated whenever stillness is in jeopardy. (2-3)

This passage is useful to understand how Emerson and Heidegger can be interpreted in different ways even though their views are fundamentally similar. Indeed, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger also writes about our "fleeing in the face of death" (*Being* 477), except that while Arsić describes Emerson's views as a condemnation of this fleeing on the grounds that it is an attempt at "stabilizing," Heidegger characterises it in terms of restlessness, as a refusal or a failure to tarry with the idea of death. As discussed in Chapter One of this investigation, not tarrying with is a characteristic of idle talk, curiosity and other forms of inauthentic care according to Heidegger, while the attempts at stabilizing or fixing that Arsić describes are due to the fact "humans consistently *neglect* what is happening to them" (emphasis added). Therefore, for both Heidegger and Emerson, rather than a matter of movement, the root of the problem—what lies prior to and what leads to the fleeing—is

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<sup>38</sup> In his Introduction to *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger's translator Albert Hofstadter writes about Heidegger's difficulty "to express a being's *own* way of occurring, happening, being present, not just *for* our understanding, will and perception, but as the being it itself is. And Heidegger eventually finds the answer in *ereignen*" (xviii). In *A Heidegger Dictionary*, Michael Inwood additionally explains how "Dasein is a happening, not a substance in and to which various things happen" and he offers a useful discussion of the subtle way in which, for Heidegger, something like the becoming or happening of Being occurs in and through Dasein:

Being appropriates man and makes him *Da-sein*, the site of being's revelation: 'Beyng as Er-eignis. The Er-eignung makes man the property [Eigentum, lit. 'owndom'] of beyng. [...] property is belongingness to the Er-eignung and this is beyng' (LXV, 263; cf. 254, 311). Beyng as *Ereignis* is not 'becoming', 'life', or 'movement' in Nietzsche's sense. To view beyng in these terms – which depend on being as beingness – makes it an object. We must not make assertions about it, but 'say it in a saying that belongs to what the saying brings forth and rejects all objectification and falsification into a state (or a "flux") [...]' (LXV, 472). (57)

a lack of careful attention. Indeed, Arsić writes that Emerson “enjoins us to follow the interruptions and inspect the line of breakages, despite the fear that comes with it. One would be required to register motions and movements and welcome changes” (3). The verbs Arsić uses (“follow,” “inspect,” and “register”) point towards the necessity of an attentiveness that Heidegger also calls for.

While the neglect, or carelessness, that characterise Heidegger’s descriptions of everyday inauthenticity go together with terms related to superficiality, it is above all associated, in Emerson’s works, with distance. That is to say, in neglecting what is happening to us, in being careless, we are at a remove from the reality of our own experience, and from what things are. Conversely, paying careful attention would result, as Arsić puts it, in “bringing us closer to our existence” (3), and in “a laughter that enjoys ruptures and mourning that brings us nearer to the loss” (3). Because this *close* attention, this nearness, is the opposite of distancing oneself from things or experiences, it closes the gap between subject and object, and a fuller relationship with life and the world becomes possible—a heart-based one that includes emotional responses, as opposed to the mind-based one of detachment characteristic of so-called scientific objectivity. This is what happens in poetry according to both Heidegger and Emerson since, as Anderson puts it: “In the poem, that has perfect organic form, subject and object have become one” (55). Emerson expresses this in some of his own poems, such as in “Fragments on the Poet and the Poetic Gift” where he writes about a poet: “As if in him the welkin walked, / The winds took flesh, the mountains talked” (*Poems*, 322). One of Emerson’s journal entries expresses similar thoughts: “‘The poet, the true naturalist, for example, domesticates himself in nature with a sense of strict consanguinity. His own blood is in the rose and apple-tree. . . . he comes to live in nature and extend his being through all: then is all true science’” (*The Journals* 7:181-2). Getting close to the point of entering a relationship that includes emotions and whereby subject and object, mind and matter, or internal and external distinctions become challenged and blurred yields a “true science” insofar as its outcome as poetry is phenomenologically more accurate and more respectful of ontological wealth and potential. It is also riskier, however, for Emerson like for Heidegger,<sup>39</sup> than having a static and detached vantage point; indeed, adopting such a way of being implies taking the risk of being *moved*. I stress this verb because the vocabulary of emotions—or, in Heideggerian

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<sup>39</sup> Virginia Lyle Jennings discusses the risk-taking nature of Heidegger’s figure of the poet in her article entitled “Heidegger’s Critique of Rilke: On the Venture and the Leap.”

language, the *logos* of the logic of the heart—includes verbs of movement or displacement, such as being stirred or shaken. These strong verbs further indicate the risk poets take; as Arsić writes: “by coming closer to life one would by no means avoid pain and danger; such a protected life does not exist” (3).

Arsić’s analysis of Emerson highlights the philosophical connection, or proximity, between the American thinker’s ideas and Heidegger’s regarding the notion of an unprotected life that faces death instead of fleeing in the face of it. Arsić for instance writes that “[i]n Emerson’s vocabulary safety and caution are forces of devastating abjection” (3) while in “What Are Poets For?” Heidegger is critical of how we are constantly “raising protective defences around the unprotected” (*Poetry* 117) by pursuing tasks that involve securing work, income, wealth, health and so on—partly in an attempt to delay death. Such a behaviour that flees from death instead of facing it means that we remain in need of, and concerned with, protection: “[w]hen human nature is absorbed in the objectification of beings, it remains unprotected in the midst of beings. Unprotected in this way, man remains related to protection, in the mode of lacking it, and thereby he remains within protection . . .” (*Poetry* 118). Quoting Rainer Maria Rilke, Heidegger argues that true safety, or “[s]ecureness, on the contrary, is outside all relation to protection, ‘outside all caring’” (*Poetry* 118) and because poets understand and acknowledge that they face death, they are ultimately able “to read the word ‘death’ *without* negation” (*Poetry* 122). This idea that the poet, for Heidegger like for Emerson, dares to have a close relationship with things, the world, and life as a whole, including what is unsettling—such as death—is also conveyed by another passage from Heidegger’s essay. Discussing the notion, which he takes from a poem by Hölderlin, that our times are no longer strongly defined by a relationship with the divine, Heidegger writes: “In the age of the world’s night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss” (*Poetry* 90). Even without going into an analysis of what Heidegger means by this, it is clear that even though he associates poetry with dwelling, the latter refers to a way of caring authentically and is not synonymous with standing still or with a grounding in a safe place. On the contrary, the poet experiences and even endures the lack of safety, or ground, “despite all suffering, despite nameless sorrow, despite the growing and spreading peacelessness, despite the mounting confusion” (*Poetry* 91). What fundamentally characterises both Emerson and Heidegger’s figures of the poet—beyond notions of mobility and immobility or staying and leaving—is therefore an authentically caring

relationship to things, the world, and life as a whole, including death, which involves paying close attention to these in a way that takes the risk of being moved, even unsettled. The latter can go as far as being swept off one's grounding sense of certainty, or experiencing groundlessness, flux, and the absence of distinction between subject and object, self and world, or mind and matter. As opposed to relationships governed by reason and a quest for objectivity and detachment, the poet's behaviour or way of being acknowledges ontological wealth and potential—including death's—because it is characterised by an abandonment that lets things be and affect them without interfering with or trying to stabilise, fix, or control those things or how they are experienced.

## **5. Poetry, the Ordinary, and Words**

After demonstrating how an authentically caring behaviour lies at the core of both Emerson and Heidegger's descriptions of the figure of the poet, and having shown how this way of being reconciles apparently divergent philosophical calls for dwelling or departing, how is the poet's work—the outcome of their authentically caring behaviour—philosophically connected to ordinary relationships to things? Do both Emerson and Heidegger put forward similar arguments regarding how poetry itself can manifest more ordinary forms of care? If so, what are the common philosophical foundations of both thinkers' views about what poetry reveals of our ordinary ways of experiencing and of relating to things? So as to answer such questions, this investigation must explore whether Heidegger's reasons for discussing things such as a bridge, a jug, or a pair of shoes, which were discussed in Chapter One, are anticipated by or stem from views Emerson holds, particularly those he puts forward in "The American Scholar." Indeed, Emerson famously writes: "I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day . . . What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body . . ." (*Essays* 68-9). Emerson calls for poetic attention to the ordinary because he realises that careful attentiveness to things such as the ones he lists reveals the ontological wealth and potential they harbour. The latter otherwise goes unacknowledged either because of how we are taken up by everyday cares or because of deliberately reductive and objectifying stances that aim at scientific detachment and objectivity. In an article that discusses the above passage from "The American Scholar," Sandra Laugier thus writes: "The ordinary, then, is what escapes us, what is distant precisely because we seek to appropriate it to us rather than letting ourselves go to the things" ("Transcendentalism" 7). Explaining

how that appropriation can take the two aforementioned forms of conceptual reduction or utilitarian grabbing, she writes: “It is our desire to grasp reality that causes us to lose it, our craving to know (as theoretical appropriation and synthesis) that keeps us from ordinary proximity with things, and cancels their availability or their attractiveness (the fact that they are at hand, handsome)” (“Transcendentalism” 6). Poetry that turns to ordinary things is therefore important also for phenomenological reasons: it reveals how we ordinarily relate to such things—including by manifesting a contrasting, authentically caring relationship to them. Poetry acknowledges and manifests what everydayness is forgetful of and what scientific detachment tries to distance itself from: our close connection to things, which also implies a relationship where feeling and mood is involved. Laugier thus writes: “the ordinary is neither conceptualized nor grasped: it is an understanding of the connection to the world, not as knowledge but as proximity and access to things, as attention to them” (“Transcendentalism” 5).

Laugier is not a Heideggerian philosopher, yet her statement corresponds to views Heidegger also expresses and which Chapter One of this investigation discusses. This is particularly apparent in the following passage from “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where Heidegger argues that “closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves”:

In what the senses of sight, hearing, and touch convey, in the sensations of colour, sound, roughness, hardness, things move us bodily, in the literal meaning of the word. . . . We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things—as this thing-concept alleges; rather, we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly. (*Poetry* 25-6)

Heidegger’s statement that “things move us” further stresses the connection between poetry and phenomenology: we are “closer” to things than we tend to think because we are constantly immersed in a network of relationships whereby things matter to us in some way or another. We are *a priori* closely connected to things and affected by them. The work of art, and poetry in particular, speaks of this connection and reveals it, including by disclosing the network of relations—the already meaningful world—in which the thing is inscribed. There is a metaphorical proximity between phenomenology and art, a connection between the ordinary and the poetic, while there is a converse metaphorical distance separating these pairs from the scientific stance of detached objectification and abstraction.

Emerson's work contains similar ideas, such as the following one from "The Sovereignty of Ethics": "A thought is imbosomed in a sentiment, and the attempt to detach and blazon the thought is like a show of cut flowers" ("Sovereignty" 405). The terms "attempt to detach" and the idea of "cut flowers" underscore how objective detachment is ultimately impossible (it is only an "attempt") and how it is at a remove from what reality is—all the while being violently reductive (through the cutting). Emerson's metaphor of cutting, which underscores both detachment and violence, together with his view that a thought is always "imbosomed in a sentiment" anticipate Heidegger's ideas below, from "The Origin of the Work of Art," about how a purely rational understanding of something amounts to making "an assault upon it" and how, conversely, "feeling or mood" is ontologically valuable:

But in defining the nature of the thing, what is the use of a feeling, however certain, if thought alone has the right to speak here? Perhaps however what we call feeling or mood, here and in similar instances, is more reasonable—that is, more intelligently perceptive—because more open to Being than all that reason which, having meanwhile become *ratio*, was misinterpreted as being rational. The hankering after the irrational, as abortive offspring of the unthought rational, therewith performed a curious service. To be sure, the current thing-concept always fits each thing. Nevertheless it does not lay hold of the thing as it is in its own being, but makes an assault upon it. (*Poetry* 24-5)

This passage highlights how, when trying to understand or define what something is, we are traditionally and scientifically inclined to want to get rid of feelings, mistakenly thinking that they lie in the way, between us and things. Not only are our attempts to grasp things intellectually an "assault," wanting to get rid of "feeling or mood" is in fact an illusion because, as Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, "the purest *theoria* does not abandon all moods, either. Even when we look theoretically at what is merely objectively present, it does not show itself in its pure outward appearance unless this *theoria* lets it come toward us in a tranquil staying. . . in *rhastone* and *diagoge*" (*Being* 130). In other words, we are never completely unaffected, detached and objective observers, as P. Christopher Smith usefully explains in this passage that clarifies what the terms *rhastone* and *diagoge* refer to:

Heidegger, even in 1924, had seen that the divorce of *logos* from *pathos*, of the rational and cognitive from what supposedly is merely ancillary feeling and emotion, was not only an abstraction from our original experience, but also an illusion. For even the most detached and abstract theoretical *logoi* or propositions have their ineliminable setting in the feeling which alone makes them possible in the first place, namely *rhastone* and *diagoge*, the relief from being harried and the leisure just to linger with things as an impartial observer of them (SZ 138). (317)

In acknowledging and manifesting our feeling-imbued and close connections to things, poetry is thus not only careful not to "assault" things by wanting to intellectually grasp

them, it also acknowledges and manifests who we more genuinely are and brings our care to our attention—thereby inviting us both to reconsider our ordinary ways of relating to things and to recognise the ontological wealth that the ordinary harbours and discloses when it is carefully attended to.

Both Emerson and Heidegger thus share an interest in ordinary things and in how there is more to them than what both the stance of everydayness and that of science have to say about them. The challenge is, according to both thinkers, “to see the ordinary, which escaped us because it is near to us, beneath our eyes,” as Laugier puts it (“Transcendentalism” 4). That is to say, both Emerson and Heidegger argue that we are surrounded by ontological wealth, but in order to become aware of this, something often needs to happen. Heidegger for instance describes in *Being and Time* how a kind of phenomenological awareness occurs when the hammer one is using suddenly breaks (*Being* 68), and how, in breaking, it draws attention to certain aspects of its Being—both its material qualities and its relationship to us as its users or makers, for example. Emerson likewise writes in *Nature* about the benefits of shifts in perspective, and how, for example, bending over to look at a familiar landscape between one’s legs allows us to see it afresh (*Essays* 34).<sup>40</sup> As these examples indicate, some trigger—such as a poem—is useful, and even often necessary, in order to bring to our attention the ways in which we relate to things, to invite us to care authentically, and, ultimately, to acknowledge and respect the ontological wealth and potential of even the most ordinary things. Most importantly, however, and regardless of whether a poem functioned as a trigger, this awareness and reconsideration of our care and of the ordinary requires a receptive stance that lets things be and that lets them affect us; as Laugier puts it, “[t]he ordinary, then, is what escapes us, what is distant precisely because we seek to appropriate it to us rather than letting ourselves go to the things” (“Transcendentalism” 7). In other words, both conceptualising—such as when we adopt a scientific stance—and grasping—such as when we carelessly use things as mere means towards an end—are to be avoided if we are to realise what things *are* to us and if we are to become aware of their ontological wealth and potential. About these two stances—the utilitarian one of everydayness and the detached scientific one—

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<sup>40</sup> This is not the only example Emerson provides; he for instance writes: “We are strangely affected by seeing the shore from a moving ship, from a balloon, or through the tints of an unusual sky. The least change in our point of view, gives the whole world a pictorial air. . . . Turn the eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture, though you have seen it any time these twenty years!” (*Essays* 33-4).



Heidegger thus writes: “It is therefore necessary to avoid the exaggerations of both” (*Poetry* 26) if we are to create a work of art, be poets and let things be.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, as Laugier further explains: “[i]t is our desire to grasp reality that causes us to lose it, our craving to know (as theoretical appropriation and synthesis) that keeps us from ordinary proximity with things, and cancels their availability or their attractiveness (the fact that they are at hand, handsome)” (“Transcendentalism” 6). That Laugier’s comments—which are made about Emerson—also accurately describe Heidegger’s ideas is a further indication that the American thinker’s views anticipate the German philosopher’s. Arsić thus goes as far as to suggest that the kind of thinker Heidegger calls for is, in fact, Emerson:

In contrast to thinking as pure will, Heidegger proposes a thinking whose main features—scattered through the pages of *What Is Called Thinking?*—would be purely relational: gentleness, patience, reception as thanking, will-lessness, the impersonal, care and attention, listening, speech that verges on silence, being on the way. . . . Heidegger proposes the image of a philosopher yet to come who will establish a gentle, relational, receptive, or simply genteel tradition of thinking. Without knowing it, one may say, Heidegger is waiting for Emerson. (324)

Such remarks are additional indications that upon close inspection, and as this investigation has sought to demonstrate, Emerson’s ideas have a philosophical complexity—more specifically, a phenomenological and an ontological depth—that anticipate Heidegger’s views, even though the former are expressed in a language that is less systematic and more literary than the latter. For Emerson as for Heidegger, the challenge is thus to adopt a way of being characterised by a respectful attentiveness, an authentic care, which has to do with receptiveness, with letting go. It is by adopting this way of being and by applying it, so to speak, to ordinary things, that the latter and our relationships to them will prove phenomenologically enlightening and ontologically rich. While it has appeared that this is what poetry does, according to both Emerson and Heidegger, poetry not only manifests a way of relating to things, it is also characterised by a way of relating to language, to words. This investigation must therefore ask whether, like Heidegger, Emerson expresses the view that paying attention to ordinary words is also a

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<sup>41</sup> To be even more specific, Heidegger writes that what is necessary is a proximity that is not artificial or exaggerated: he describes the abstract intellectualisation of something into a “thing-concept” as an “inordinate attempt” that forcefully “makes it press too hard upon us” (*Poetry*, 26). Conversely, a concerned, task oriented, utilitarian use of things puts them too far, “at arm’s length” (*Poetry*, 26)—an expression which further points to a continuity in his works insofar as it calls to mind his description of the “handiness” of “things at hand” in *Being and Time* (*Being* 94).

way for the poet to manifest—and for their readers to be introduced to—a caring way of being towards ordinary things. Is the former a sign and a means of achieving the latter?

If, as Laugier puts it, “establishing a connection to ordinary life and to its details, its particularities” (“Transcendentalism” 2) is what Emerson and Heidegger call for, how can this be achieved through language according to the American thinker? Just as Heidegger pairs, in his works, phenomenological analysis with attention to words and etymology, so does Emerson understand, Laugier argues, that ordinary *language*, as well as ordinary things, can be enlightening. That is to say, Emerson’s aforementioned call for an exploration of the ordinary and common, in “The American Scholar,” not only sets up the premises for phenomenological enquiry,<sup>42</sup> but also an insight of what Ludwig Wittgenstein will later write about, and what will develop into what is known as ordinary language philosophy. Quoting Wittgenstein, Laugier explains what the latter implies: “‘Discovering what is said to us, just like discovering what we say, is to discover the exact place of where it is said; to understand why it is said at this precise place, here and now’ (ibid: 34). It is the education, or the method of ordinary language: to see why, when, we say what we say, in which circumstances” (“Transcendentalism” 4). This means two things: first, that paying careful attention to words can be just as revealing as paying attention to our relationships to things, and, second, that the former (our use of words) can have an effect on the latter (things and our relationships to them). Before clarifying this further, it is worth laying out Laugier’s arguments in more detail: “[i]t is this capacity to mark and inventory differences that makes language an adequate instrument of perception” Laugier writes “because reality is made up of these details and differences (which show up in the account we give them [sic])” (“Transcendentalism” 13). That is to say, descriptions or accounts of things tell us what these things and our relationships to them *are*; care in the former goes hand in hand with wealth in the latter: phenomenology and ontology are linked, and language is what bridges the two. Laugier thus writes about “the attention or care to detail, which brings about the humanity to the description of the ordinary” (“Transcendentalism” 10), a passage which highlights that descriptions are just as much about things as they are about the

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<sup>42</sup> Earlier sections of this chapter evidence this point, but it is worth pointing out that Laugier also suggests this since she writes that, with Emerson, “the transcendental question is no longer: How do we know to start from experience? (A question which, since Hume, one knows leads to the response: one knows nothing at all – and thus leads to scepticism). But rather: How do we approach the world? How do we have an experience?” (“Transcendentalism” 5-6). Those last two questions about how the world is approached and experienced are phenomenological ones and lie at the core of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, as discussed in the first chapter of this study.

relationship (“the humanity”) that one has with things—given that the two cannot be separated. Laugier continues by explaining how “[i]n experience, there is no separating thought (spontaneity) and receptivity (vulnerability), comprehension and perception” (“Transcendentalism” 10) and literature—poetry in particular—can help us realise this. Indeed, Laugier makes the two above statements in a passage of her article where she draws on novelist Henry James and his essay “The Art of Fiction,” before referring to philosopher J. L. Austin a few pages on: “the conscience refined by words is the refinement and education of our perception” (“Transcendentalism” 13). Laugier’s arguments thus not only further evidence how Emerson’s work contains claims that anticipate some of Heidegger’s ontological and phenomenological ideas, her article also indicates that Emerson’s views regarding language—which he calls “fossil poetry” (*Essays* 457)—together with his call for a poetic attentiveness to the ordinary contain some of the premises of ordinary language philosophy.

So as to better understand this philosophical aspect and the relevance of Emerson’s ideas about poetry for ordinary language philosophy, it is worth clarifying the links between Emerson’s views on language and his proto-phenomenological claims. Arsić’s analysis of what Emerson writes about children’s use of language is helpful in this respect, as she points out that the way children use words is a manifestation of their way of being and of relating to things. Quoting Emerson, Arsić explains that, according to the American thinker, the language of children points towards the fundamental intertwining of perception and comprehension, phenomenology and ontology, subject and object:

The thinking of the child, therefore, should show us the way toward our own recovery. But how is the recovery to occur, how does the child think? Emerson is quite specific in responding to this question: the child takes nouns, which identify and substantialize, and dissolves them into verbs (“Children and savages use only nouns or names of things, which they convert into verbs, and apply to analogous mental acts”), thus turning identities and beings into processes and becomings. . . . Since names of things have vanished, along with the pronouns that replace them, the subject position is omitted from language (which is why the child doesn’t say “I”). The recovered language of transformation consists of pure verbs—processes, motions, movements—ascribed to no one. As a result, the distinction between “I” and “not I” is liquidated, which means that in such a language the position of “subjectiveness” cannot be uttered. Both become fused. . . . (54-5)

In his own way, Emerson thus claims, like Heidegger, that subject and object are *a priori* intertwined, and that so-called objectivity and detachment come *a posteriori*. According to the American thinker, the child’s use of words shows what our fundamental being-in-the-world is like, and what things are for us first and foremost, prior to any scientific

detachment or utilitarian reduction. Arsić therefore adds, in a Heideggerian turn of phrase, that “[i]n the same way in which the language used to speak the world, the child says what is (it speaks being),” (56). This connection and proximity to the world, which reaches a point where notions subjectivity and objectivity dissolve, also implies being moved, i.e., having an emotional relationship to things. This stands in contrast to how we think—at least since Descartes’s *Meditations*, Arsić argues in the passage below—ourselves and about the words we use:

The separation of the “I” from its body, which at the beginning of modernity, with Descartes’s *Meditations*, as well as at the beginning of Emerson’s *Nature*, turns the body into the “Not Me,” also alienated words from organs. Since it doesn’t live in its sense the “I” doesn’t put its heart at stake when it says “emotion,” and having lost its own body, no longer knows how to transform the word *emotion* into the heartbeat. (56)

In order to re-enter close and heartfelt relationships to the world, it is therefore also necessary to stop thinking of the mind and of the words we use as disembodied and decontextualised; it means abandoning what Heidegger calls, in “What Are Poets For?”, Descartes’s “logic of calculating reason” (*Poetry* 125) . The ‘there’ in which one ‘is’ (*Dasein*) includes one’s sensitive and emotional body—and song, even more than speech, acknowledges and reveals this fundamentally corporeal nature of words. Arsić consequently concludes that “[p]redicated on the domestication of minds in bodies, the recovery of the world would require the becoming-child of the man. Those who set themselves on the way of such a becoming Emerson calls poets” (57). While the child, in this narrative, is a figure that stands at a prelapsarian point, prior both to the separation of poetry from ordinary language and to post-Cartesian understandings of the mind, subjectivity, and words, the poet, conversely, is a figure that is recovering from that fall. The poet is “on the way” out of the narrow pit of the way adults relate to things and words—the pit into which the child will eventually fall as they become an adult, and which post-Cartesian modernity has deepened.

Our everyday ways of relating to things and of using words, like those of modern philosophers, are therefore but the pale shadows or spectres, Arsić writes in the passage below, of the more fundamental and more authentically caring way of being that characterises poets:

To the extent that all humans who are not children speak a language that is oblivious to things and divorced from bodies, they all speak the language of the philosopher. In that sense there are no “ordinary” words, for like so many philosophical concepts—and like thoughts, habits and customs—they have been severed from the life of things and turned

into abstractions. Like any philosophical language, our ordinary language is therefore spectral. (54)

The severing of word from emotion and of mind from body, like the detachment of things from their contexts, amounts to a process of reduction and abstraction that turns words, like things themselves, into the shadows of what they fundamentally are. However, paying close attention to our uses of words and to ordinary things, which is what poetry does according to both Emerson and Heidegger, reverses this process and reveals the ontological wealth and potential of things as well as the unacknowledged phenomenological complexity of our relationships to the world. Thus, even though “[m]an is a god in ruins” (*Essays* 45), with a “ruin or . . . blank” in his eye (*Essays* 47), “[p]oets are liberating gods,” (*Essays* 462), seers (*Essays* 464) with a “transparent eye-ball” (*Essays* 10) whose authentically caring work helps us restore our eyesight and makes us realise that we fundamentally are “all poets and mystics” (*Essays* 454). With ordinary words as with ordinary things, it is when we change our relationships to them by being authentically caring, which involves paying close and heartfelt attention to them, that phenomenological complexity and ontological wealth surfaces, as in poetry.

The ways in which these ideas about poetry are relevant to the aforementioned ideas put forward by Laugier—and how Emerson’s ideas contain some of the premises of ordinary language philosophy—become even more apparent if one considers how Cavell describes, in “An Emerson Mood,” a “sense of intimacy with existence, or intimacy lost, [which] is fundamental to the experience of what I understand ordinary language philosophy to be” (*The Senses* 145). The term “intimacy lost” indicates that ordinary language philosophy, like Emerson’s work, points towards a fundamental and close, intimate, or emotional relationship to the world, which can be sensed when attention is paid to our uses of words. According to Cavell, paying close attention to ordinary language, to our uses of words, can lead one to feel that something about our way of being in the world remains philosophically ungraspable and unsaid: “[w]hat the ordinary language philosopher is feeling—but I mean to speak just for myself in this—is that our relation to the world’s existence is somehow *closer* than the ideas of believing and knowing are made to convey” Cavell writes (*The Senses* 145). That is to say, ordinary language points towards fundamental ways of being and of relating to things which escape traditional philosophical attempts at grasping truths—particularly if one thinks of Descartes’s attempts at distinguishing knowledge from beliefs in his *Meditations*. Cavell continues by explaining

that “[t]his sense of my natural relation to existence is what Thoreau means by our being *next* to the laws of nature, by our *neighbouring* the world, by our being *beside* ourselves. Emerson’s idea of the *near* is one of the inflections he gives to the common, the low,” (*The Senses* 146). In writing this, he is referring to Emerson’s aforementioned call, in “The American Scholar” for the proximate and ordinary and argues that this call is an invitation for us to think about how we are and how we relate to things: “In speaking of the near, and praising it as ‘richer than all foreign parts,’ . . . [Emerson also] asks us to consider what it is native for us to do, and what is native to philosophy, to thinking” (*The Senses* 148). That is to say, in asking American scholars, artists or poets to pay close attention not only to ordinary things but also to their *meaning*—“What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan” (*Essays* 69)—Emerson asks for attention to be drawn to that relationship of closeness, that “intimacy lost,” which Cavell describes and which ordinary language philosophy also points towards. This relationship is all at once, according to Emerson, what makes us all poets and mystics, what poetry recovers from childhood (following its loss in adulthood), and what poetry manifests. Indeed, insofar as poetry explicitly and authentically *cares* by paying close and heartfelt attention to whatever is at stake, it provides what comes closest to an expression of the silent and close immersion in a network of meaning that Cavell “senses” and that Heidegger strives to describe in *Being and Time*. In other words, what poetry manifests according to Emerson and Heidegger, what both authors’ works call for, and what ordinary language philosophy also “senses” according to Cavell, is our unacknowledged and fundamental caring way of being. Cavell’s understanding of Emerson and Heidegger’s ideas and the legacies of these two thinkers’ views about poetry need to be discussed in more detail, but before such a discussion takes place in the fourth and final chapter of this investigation, a study of some of the origins of Emerson and Heidegger’s views about poetry is required, notably through an exploration of the works of William Wordsworth. Moreover, in *In Quest of the Ordinary* Cavell discusses the British poet whose prose works defend and call for a poetry of the ordinary, that is to say, a poetry that uses both ordinary language and ordinary subject matter. Delving into Wordsworth’s ideas about poetry will therefore both shed new light onto the ideas discussed so far and pave the way for an exploration of their relation to Cavell’s views. However, before concluding this chapter on Emerson’s ideas and turning, in Chapter Three, to the prose and poetry of Wordsworth—in whose works lie some of the origins of Emerson’s conception of poetry—it is worth reading one of Emerson’s poems,

“Each and All.” Analysing this poem in the light of the points discussed so far will not only be an opportunity to see how the American thinker also expressed some of his ideas in verse, it will provide a concrete example of how poetry manifests and fosters authentic care.

## 6. “Each and All”

Not only does Emerson’s poem “Each and All” contain an explicit philosophical message worth discussing—a message conveyed by lines such as “Nothing is fair or good alone” (*Poems*, 4) or “I yielded myself to the perfect whole” (*Poems* 6)—it also manifests authentic care through more subtle and indirect means such as a series of compositional choices that thwart reductive interpretations all the while drawing attention to both phenomenological wealth and ontological complexities. I have already briefly mentioned, in the first part of this chapter, how the poem’s philosophical message calls for a relationship to things characterised by a receptive sensitivity that does not grasp and isolate things but is aware and respectful, instead, of the context of which they are a part. It is worth discussing this point further and showing how it is conveyed both in what I consider to be the poem’s three parts<sup>43</sup> and through formal characteristics such as structure, sounds, imagery, and so on. Clarifying the relationship between that philosophical message and authentic care is necessary, notably by devoting a significant part of this analysis of the poem to its third and last part, and more specifically to how its structure and its use of key words and sounds—together with its more explicit philosophical content—result in a phenomenological and ontological combination that manifests Heideggerian authentic care.

The poem is organised around a series of images, subject-matter, and structures that sometimes have two parts, sometimes three parts to them, and the coexistence of these structures suggests an acknowledgement of complexity that embraces open-ended interpretative wealth and potential. So as to perceive this and get a sense of how the poem is organised, Norman Miller’s following summary of the poem is a useful starting point:

After stressing the need to recognize men’s mutual dependence upon one another, the poem moves through a series of three “cases” in which particulars—a sparrow, sea shells, a virgin—are removed from their proper setting and “brought home.”

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<sup>43</sup> My division of the poem into three parts also corresponds to the way the poem is divided into three stanzas in Eva March Tappan’s 1898 edition of Emerson’s *Select Essays and Poems*.

Each loses its charm and beauty when isolated from its natural environment. The observer then rebukes beauty as “unripe childhood’s cheat” and distinguishes it from truth. But as he speaks he is consumed by the composition of the total surrounding—flowers, trees, and sky—and he at last yields himself to the “perfect whole.” (384)

Miller’s summary conveys a sense of how the poem contains three parts, but the first of these is only mentioned briefly (“after stressing the need to recognize men’s mutual dependence upon one another”). While second part comprises the three “cases” Miller mentions (“a sparrow, sea shells, a virgin”)—which are easily identifiable given that the speaker relates three separate events and therefore discusses the three “cases” one after the other—the third and last section of the poem is structured differently. Unlike what Miller suggests, the last part comprises more elements than just “flowers, trees, and sky”—there is also the “rolling river, the morning bird” (*Poems* 6) mentioned in the antepenultimate line—and unlike in the second section of the poem, all such elements are part of the same setting and event. The plurality and diversity of the things mentioned in that last part—such as the “ground-pine” (*Poems* 5), “club-moss” (*Poems* 5) and the “oaks and firs” (*Poems* 6)—together with the fact that they do not constitute isolated case-studies but rather also constitute a context (the speaker’s immediate environment) means that there is no triptych structure to this third part, unlike in the first two. Indeed, although Miller only briefly mentions the first part of the poem in the above passage, it also contains three separate scenes: one with a “red-cloaked clown” (*Poems* 5) in a field, another with a heifer lowing “in the upland farm” (*Poems* 5), and a third in which a “sexton, tolling his bell at noon” (*Poems* 5) is heard by Napoleon up in the Alps. Within the three-part structure of the poem, the first two parts thus contain triptychs with clearly identifiable subject-matter, but the third only contains one scene that includes a range of elements that are both contextual—insofar as they constitute the speaker’s environment (his “total surrounding” as Miller puts it in the above passage)—and central given that the speaker’s experience of those things is the subject-matter of this third part.

The fact that the speaker’s experience is the subject-matter of the third section of the poem becomes apparent when one considers how, in the last ten lines of the poem, the verbs associated with the speaker are related to sensory perception: “I inhaled” (*Poems* 5), “I saw . . . I heard” (*Poems* 6). The only exception to this is “I yielded myself” (*Poems* 6) in



the final line, but this verb also conveys the impression of giving up on action and of deliberately letting oneself be affected, or acted upon, passively. “Again I saw, again I heard,” (*Poems* 6) is a line that emphasises this impression through its structure: its two halves, separated by a comma, mirror each other, while the reiteration of the word “again”—a word that already signals the repetition of something that occurred previously—further stresses the importance of sensitive reception. In other words, because there is both a horizontal repetition—“again” is repeated within the line—and a vertical one—because of the reference to something that already happened—an impression of circularity is conveyed; there is no message or commentary beyond the reaffirmation of, and the repeated return to, sensory experience. Moreover, the line that follows also has a similar structure since in “The rolling river, the morning bird;—” (*Poems* 6), the noun groups on both sides of the comma are constructed in a similar way: an adjective ending in “-ing” followed by a noun which, like the adjective, contains a sound made by the letter “r.” This letter occurs five times in the six words of this line, which further draws attention, through the sounds created, both to this part’s subject-matter of sense impressions—how things are experienced—and to the repetitive and circular—or “rolling”—nature of the poem’s conclusion. Indeed, the poem does not go beyond the stage of receptive sensitivity insofar as no action is taken by the speaker—not even speaking or thinking like at the beginning of this third part—and no generalising or rationalising conclusion follows beyond the reassertion, through “yielded” in the final line, of this receptive stance of letting-go.

This ending thus contrasts with how this third section of the poem begins with a spoken attempt at drawing rational conclusions from the case-studies of part two—“Then I said, ‘I covet truth; / Beauty is unripe childhood’s cheat; / I leave it behind with the fames of youth:’” (*Poems* 5). Even though this line ends with a colon—as if some decision or action were going to ensue—this attempt at a conclusion gets interrupted by sensory experience: “As I spoke, beneath my feet / The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath, / Running over the club-moss burs;” (*Poems* 5). Whereas “As I spoke, beneath my feet” is a short line that reads all the more quickly that it starts with a suspense-building “As” followed shortly afterwards by an interruption-marking comma, the next two lines, by contrast, slow the reader down. This is achieved through a series of sounds conveyed by the letter “r,” particularly in “The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,” through the circular imagery of “curled” and “wreath,” through hyphenated noun groups that convey detailed images about specific types of vegetation (such as “club-moss burs”), and finally through the simple

fact that any curling or “running” done by a plant necessarily happens comparatively slowly. Like the speaker of the poem surrounded by vegetation, the reader is thus compelled to slow down and is rolled up, so to speak, in a visual and auditory experience composed of slow and circular movements and sounds conveyed by the letter “r.” Although a few lines earlier the speaker had started to draw a conclusion by deciding to “leave it [Beauty] behind”, what is in fact abandoned is precisely this conclusion, as confirmed by the penultimate line of the poem: “Beauty through my senses stole;” (*Poems* 6). Moreover, the use of the verb “steal” in that line suggests an agency on beauty’s part and a passivity on the speaker’s part, which constitutes a flipping around or a reversal of agency when compared to the speaker’s actions in part two—where the sparrow and sea shells get snatched from their respective environments and brought home by the speaker. Whereas the speaker’s actions that isolate the objects and “cage” (*Poems* 5) the maid like the sparrow result in beauty being left behind—“But the poor, unsightly, noisome things / Had left their beauty on the shore” (*Poems* 5), as is said of the sea shells—it is by adopting the opposite attitude and by leaving the speaker’s conclusion behind (the conclusion about leaving beauty behind), that beauty is experienced once again. Not only beauty, but “perfect whole[ness]” is experienced and restored at the end of the poem by letting-go of the initial desire to uproot, bring back home, and “cage” things, by being aware of context and experience, and by being receptively and respectfully appreciative of those. Emerson’s poem suggests the environment and how it is experienced is an integral part how something is perceived and of its beauty; things are always set within a context and an experience, which is why it would be a mistake to think that beauty is something that belongs to, or is within, an object. Rather, beauty is an experience and things belong to it insofar as they contribute to that experience; thus, the speaker says of the sparrow brought home: “it pleases not now, / For I did not bring home the river and sky” (*Poems* 5) and of the sea shells that their beauty stayed “on the shore / With the sun and the sand and the wild uproar” (*Poems* 5). The repetitive catalogue effect of this last line further stresses that the experience of beauty is something granted by a multiplicity of things and the innumerable wealth of one’s environment, rather than with a singular object uprooted from its context. The shift that occurs in the third part of the poem also underscores this point, since, unlike in the previous section, the reader’s attention is not drawn to one thing more than to another; all the things described play a role in the speaker’s experience without one being singled out. Therefore, the truth that the speaker “covet[s]” (*Poems* 5)

and eventually comes to understand is that things should be appreciated as, and with an acknowledgement of, the context and experience that they participate in building. Emerson's poem thereby suggests that ontologies need to be corrected by phenomenology because the former cannot be separated from the latter. Indeed, what the speaker cares for, what matters to them, and what they seek to preserve when bringing the sea shells home, is not the thing as substance, as object that can be taken away and possessed—though they mistakenly think this way initially—it is in fact the event of the encounter with the thing, the impression that arose from their experience. This Heideggerian realisation and conclusion of the poem—that our understandings of what things *are* are fundamentally linked to how we experience them—arises alongside, and as a result of a careful attentiveness and a respectful reception that lets go of the urge to secure and possess, which is a form of authentic care displayed by the speaker in the final scene.

This authentic care at the end of the poem is even more salient when contrasted with how, in the second part of the poem, the speaker's action of taking the sea shells home is called "their safe escape to me" (*Poems* 5). Indeed, sheltering the sea shells from "the savage sea" (*Poems* 5) and from "the weeds and foam" (*Poems* 5) is not at all an authentically caring behaviour, but rather its opposite—and not only because it consists in a possessive and detaching move that disregard the thing's wider context, as described above. Quoting the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, Heidegger contends that authentic safety, or "[s]ecureness . . . is outside all relation to protection, 'outside all caring'" (*Poetry* 118). That is to say, authentic care, like the poet, avoids "raising protective defences around the unprotected" (*Poetry* 117), is careful to let things be, is accepting of vulnerability and impermanence, of our "unshieldedness" (*Poetry* 117)—even of death (*Poetry* 122)—and respects the context, or world, in which any given thing is immersed. The Heideggerian aspects of such an accepting dwelling in the world, and additional ways in which the poem manifests authentic care, become apparent when one considers how the poem gathers the fourfold and "unfold[s] world," as Heidegger puts it (*Poetry* 197). Heidegger's fourfold of "earth and sky, divinities and mortals" (*Poetry* 147) is most explicitly present in the last part of the poem which mentions ". . . the eternal sky / Full of light and deity" (*Poems* 6) as well as "the ground" (*Poems* 5)—a word that stands out since it does not rhyme with any other. In fact, "sky" and "deity"—which end the two lines that follow—do not rhyme either, and together with the line that ends with "ground" those are the only ones that do not rhyme with any other in this third part of the poem—"sky" and "deity" create an eye rhyme, but

“ground” cannot be paired in such a way with any other word. Though mortals are not as explicitly mentioned, the scene contains a mortal—the speaker—who, at the beginning of this third part, mentions “childhood” and “youth” (*Poems* 5) as temporary times when one is deluded, thus evoking impermanence and becoming older. Moreover, both evergreen and deciduous trees, commonly associated with permanence and impermanence respectively, are described: “Around me stood the oaks and firs; / Pine-cones and acorns lay on the ground” (*Poems* 6). The presence of those trees’ seeds and fruit evokes rebirth, potential, and growth from the ground up, all the more so that with the next line the poem goes from the ground to the sky, like a tree: “Over me soared the eternal sky” (*Poems* 6). The speaker is thus not only surrounded by vegetation—“Around me. . .” (*Poems* 6)—but immersed, on the vertical plane too, in a world that comprises both the eternity of “deity,” associated with the sky, and the circular, cyclical impermanence of growth, youth, death, and rebirth. The speaker does not attempt to break the repetitive nature of this cycle nor to resolve any apparent oppositions (between sky and ground or eternity and impermanence); rather, the poem conveys an acceptance of dualism and repetition by reaffirming these aspects through the structure and sounds of the lines that follow, as discussed earlier: “Again I saw, again I heard, / The rolling river, the morning bird;—” (*Poems* 6).

Another manner in which the poem fosters authentic care lies in the way the positions of the speaker and of the addressee shift, inviting the addressee to reconsider their own relationship to things, to the speaker, and to the poem itself. The first part of the poem, which ends with “Nothing is fair or good alone” (*Poems* 4) is characterised by an absence of first-person singular pronouns. Unlike in the rest of the poem, where “I” appears twelve times, the speaker does not mention any personal experience; instead, scenes involving other people, including the addressee, are described, and the speaker makes general statements such as the one quoted above. Conversely, while the addressee is referred to five times in the first ten lines of the poem, through pronouns such as “thee,” “thy,” “thou,” and “thine” (*Poems* 4), such pronouns are absent from the forty remaining lines of the poem; the addressee is neither mentioned, nor addressed, past line ten. There are two complementary effects to this compositional choice and to the sharp contrast between the first part of the poem and the other two. First, by drawing the addressee straight into the first scene of the poem—“Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown / Of thee from the hill-top looking down;” (*Poems* 4)—the speaker invites readers to position themselves within this kind of scene and to reflect upon their perspectives, particularly

given the attention-drawing positions of “Little thinks . . . / Of thee . . .” at the start of the first two lines. However, because the addressee is absent from parts two and three of the poem, and because the speaker’s first-person singular pronouns appear instead, readers are given the opportunity to switch roles, to identify with the speaker, and to think about both this change and their relationships to the events described. Moreover—and this is the second effect—the poem not only becomes more personal, but also more hesitant, less self-certain, particularly given the shift from the declarative tone and omniscience conveyed by the general statements in the first part to the silent surrender to sensory experience in the third and final part. The speaker’s declaration to the addressee in the first part—“Nor knowest thou what argument / Thy life to thy neighbor’s creed has lent” (*Poems* 4)—eventually applies to the speaker at the end of the poem since no conclusion is drawn about the “argument,” or value, that the speaker’s experience might have for the addressee. Thus, as the speaker concludes by telling the addressee “I yielded,” so is the poem given up into the addressee and readers’ hands; they are left free to make sense of the speaker’s experience and of the open ending of the poem. The speaker therefore goes from an initially authoritative and external position—placing the addressee in a scene at the start of the poem and drawing a general conclusion about this kind of scene—to a receptive and sensitive position at the heart of a scene which the addressee and readers are free to interpret and draw conclusions about. The poem thereby manifests authentic care since it does not force any meaning onto the reader and instead puts the reader and addressee’s care back into their hands, acknowledging them as caring, meaning-making beings in charge of deciding how they wish to understand the poem.

So as to conclude this study of “Each and All,” it is worth returning to its structure—which I already mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this analysis—for it too manifests and fosters authentic care given how it thwarts expectations and eludes any kind of rigid framing if one tries to analyse its structure. For instance, even though I have shown that the poem has three parts and that the first two each contain a series of three scenes, the poem also comprises a series of dual structures. The fact that, unlike part one, both parts two and three contain the speaker’s personal experiences—as well as what I pointed out earlier about the use of personal pronouns—suggests a two-part division. The end of the poem also comprises sets of twos, such as the ones I commented on earlier regarding the lines “Again I saw, again I heard, / The rolling river, the morning bird” (*Poems* 6). Those two lines moreover rhyme, as do the following two that conclude the poem. Among the other pairs

in this third part of the poem are the “oaks and firs; / Pine-cones and acorns” (*Poems* 6) as well as the fact that the sky is said to be “Full of light and of deity;” (*Poems* 6). The presence of both double and triple structures in the poem suggests that neither can be considered to dominate its architecture. Christopher Daniel Felker argues that plurality and disassociation dominate the poem: “the use of distinct episodes tends to disassociate the structure of the poem into parts” (19). Instead of grouping the poem’s scenes into sets or parts as I have, Felker sees them as functioning more independently; according to him “Emerson placed a variety of images in the poem to stand alone so as to enable the reader to draw his/her own conclusions” (19). I agree with Felker’s idea that the poem is characterised by an openness that invites readers to interpret it as they see fit, however, “Each and All” allows not only plurality and independence, but also unity and oneness. These latter notions are conveyed by the absence of stanzas, by the concluding word of the poem: “I yielded myself to the perfect *whole*” (*Poems* 6, my emphasis), and by the title itself. Composed of *three* words, the latter contains *two* notions—individuality (“each”) and plurality (“all”)—which are linked by a conjunction and which, together, result in an expression that conveys the inclusive idea of comprehensiveness and entirety. What these different points about the difficulty to clearly define the structure of Emerson’s poem indicate, is that the poem both allows and resists being framed—or “cage[d]” like the poem’s sparrow (*Poems* 5)—once and for all in one way or another. As Felker writes, “Through careful composition he [Emerson] sought to leave open many of the questions regarding the final message conveyed by the verses” (19). The way “Each and All” is constructed allows and invites readers to reconsider their understandings of the poem, to pay careful attention to its complexities, and it thereby also manifests and fosters the authentic care that it calls for.

## 7. Closing Remarks

Before beginning a discussion centred on Wordsworth in Chapter Three, and as was the case at the end of Chapter One, a few concluding words acknowledging the limitations of this second chapter’s exploration of Emerson’s ideas prove necessary. Indeed, my demonstration of the ways in which Emerson’s works contain, put forward, and anticipate many of Chapter One’s arguments regarding the Heideggerian notion that poetry manifests care, though thorough, does not amount to a comprehensive analysis of all of Emerson’s works or ideas. For instance, because of the scope of this investigation as a whole, and

because I have focused on the areas where Emerson's views overlap with Heidegger's, there are several aspects this exploration has not discussed, including the following four points. First, I have not analysed the ways in which Emerson's ideas about poetry or specific poets evolved in the three decades that separate his early and late essays. For example, and to be more specific, twenty-eight years separate "The Poet" (1844) from "Poetry and the Imagination" (1872). I have not pointed out the changes in Emerson's views because this chapter has sought to extract and analyse Emerson's core-ideas on poetry rather than track and discuss the more peripheral evolutions of his ideas. This is also why I have chosen to focus primarily on Emerson's theoretical views instead of studying all of his poems or his assessments of the works of other poets. A second point has to do with the fact that I have not addressed some of the ways in which Emerson and Heidegger's ideas—or Cavell's—fundamentally differ, particularly when it comes to metaphysics.<sup>44</sup> A third aspect that has not been investigated is the politics tied to Emerson's views on poetry.<sup>45</sup> A fourth one is the

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<sup>44</sup> I mention this notably because critics such as Joseph Urbas may argue that Emerson and Heidegger's ideas on poetry cannot be fundamentally reconciled because Heidegger is aversive to metaphysics whereas Emerson is not. In "Cavell's 'Moral Perfectionism' or Emerson's 'Moral Sentiment'," for instance, Urbas argues that Emerson's ideas—his ethics in particular—"have a secure metaphysical ground" (1) and that this makes them fundamentally incompatible with Cavell's "strong aversion to metaphysics" (1). Urbas sees "a major problem" (4) in this, and he argues that Cavell "exaggerate[s] the power of scepticism and 'groundlessness' in Emerson's thought" (1) to the extent that "[t]he overall result . . . is blatantly inconsistent with Emerson's own writings" (1). Urbas does not discuss Heidegger's ideas, yet it seems to me that the latter, because they do away with metaphysics—but not with ontology, on the contrary—are useful to understand why Cavell understands Emerson's views to be compatible with his own. In other words, I claim that my work demonstrates how Emerson's ideas about poetry *are* compatible with Heidegger's—and Cavell's—in spite of these thinkers' diverging views on metaphysics.

<sup>45</sup> Among the topics that the scope of my work prevents me from investigating are Emerson and Heidegger's forms of elitism and nationalism, and how Emerson's ideas on are tied to his democratic ideals. For instance, at first glance, Emerson's view that "the poet is representative" (*Essays*, 448) may seem to stand in contrast with Heidegger's elitist description of the poet—whose uniqueness and authenticity is at a remove from the 'They' and its everydayness and inauthenticity, which are criticised in *Being and Time*. Emerson's poet, however, is no less unique, or part of a select few, as Heidegger's is: "I look in vain for the poet whom I describe," (*Essays*, 465) Emerson for instance writes. Another point is that Emerson's poet, like Heidegger's, is described as paying careful attention to, and as singing, the ontological and semantic wealth of ordinary, local, everyday things and words. I am aware that one of the political implications of this proximity and of 'local'—by contrast with 'global'—is a focus on things national. Heidegger is thus concerned with nurturing the specificities of Germany, especially its language and culture, and with preserving these from the growing global cultural influence of the United States of America, which he criticises. Emerson likewise urges poets and artists of his recently founded nation to stop looking back, or up, to Anglo-European standards, expectations, traditions and legacies. He calls for a poetic and artistic emancipation from the cultural diktats of Anglo-European cultures, and asks poets to pay careful attention to, and to sing, ordinary, local, American specificities—regardless of how unrefined or uncultured they may appear to Anglo-European readers and critics.

question of whether Emerson's moral perfectionism is philosophically linked to his ideas about poetry. Such topics have not been discussed for the same reasons that similar ones were not dealt with in Chapter One's discussions of Heidegger's views: doing justice to the ethics or the politics of those two thinkers' works would have required several additional chapters and would have shifted the focus of this study further away from poetics.

In spite of such limitations, this chapter has demonstrated that Emerson's works contain phenomenological and ontological claims about what things are and about how we, and the poet he describes, relate to them. The philosophical scope of these claims, and of the way Emerson characterises the poet's way of being, has been revealed and has become clearer by discussing these aspects alongside the Heideggerian idea that poetry manifests authentic care. Thus, just as Chapter One argued that poetry pertains to authentic care because it shares characteristics common to what Heidegger calls helpful solicitude, listening and hearing—"hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (*Being* 206)—Chapter Two has argued that, for Emerson, the poet's work is akin to a solicitous manifestation of authentic care thanks to which "I open my eye on my own possibilities" (*Essays* 409). This notion of openness to one's "own" potential, present in both Emerson and Heidegger's words, is an indication of an attentive acknowledgement of how and who one is and can be. Moreover, just as Heidegger argues that poetry is linked to what he calls a Pascalian logic of the heart that preserves and discloses the ontological wealth of things through an unfolding of the world they are part of, Emerson describes poetry as a work of the heart revealing what things fundamentally are. Like Heidegger, Emerson points out the ontological paucity of detached, de-contextualised, purely reason-based and objectifying ways of relating to people or things—ways of being or, as Heidegger would put it, of caring—which he associates with scientific materialism. Conversely, like Heidegger, he associates the poet's stance with a way of being he describes as fundamental in all human beings: "the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man" (*Essays* 448). The ways poetry is restorative and educative, and how it manifests and fosters authentic care, was also pointed out, particularly through a study of the implications of what Emerson writes about poetry's relationship to ordinary things and words. Towards the end of the chapter, how Emerson's work anticipates both some of Heidegger's ideas about poetry and aspects of ordinary language philosophy was discussed before ending with an analysis of Emerson's poem "Each and All" that showed how it manifests authentic care. What this investigation



therefore needs to study now, first, is some of the origins of Emerson and Heidegger's ideas before exploring some of the legacies of their ideas on poetry. Doing so will further highlight the relevance that the idea that poetry manifests care has for poetics, literary criticism, and the history of ideas.

## Chapter Three: Wordsworth

After looking at the ideas put forward by Heidegger and Emerson, this investigation has determined that, for both authors, poetry manifests authentic care. This means that, according to the views this investigation has been discussing, poetry conveys, fosters, and is the outcome of an awareness of the wealth of possible meanings and understandings that things, people, and our relationships to them, harbour. For both Emerson and Heidegger poetry thus respects phenomenological, ontological, and semantic wealth and complexity. Having demonstrated this overlap between Emerson and Heidegger's views on poetry now raises the question of the reasons for such philosophical affinities: what accounts for this significant compatibility between an American thinker's nineteenth-century views on poets and poetry, and a German philosopher's twentieth-century texts on such points? This chapter argues that the answer to this question lies predominantly in Romantic poetry, particularly such as William Wordsworth defines it. If both Emerson and Heidegger write about the works of Romantic poets, and if their works convey the notion that poetry manifests care, it is because Romantic poetry asks questions or brings to the fore problems out of which Emerson and Heidegger's ideas emerge. The scope of this study prevents it from taking a comparative approach that would look at the particularities of both the German and the British Romantic poets and poems that influenced Heidegger and Emerson respectively. Although this might have explained some of the similarities and differences between their works, this study has chosen to sacrifice breadth for depth, and to narrow its focus down to one influential British poet whose works influenced Emerson: Wordsworth. This implies abandoning an enquiry into works that directly influenced Heidegger, and there are two main reasons for this choice. The first is that although Emerson's works may not have had any direct, traceable influence on Heidegger's works, the American writer's ideas have a significant legacy in philosophy and in literary theory, including owing to Nietzsche who was directly and traceably influenced by Emerson before being himself a significant and traceable influence on Heidegger. In this respect, going up the stream of ideas that influenced Emerson's work means going up a tributary of those that influenced Heidegger's and that fed into his ideas about poetry. The second reason is that if some of the origins of the idea that poetry manifests care are found in British Romantic poetry—for instance, if this chapter succeeds in demonstrating that one of Wordsworth's poems

manifests care—it will mean that this idea, drawn from an analysis of a twentieth-century German philosopher’s works, is a pertinent tool both for British Romantic studies of poetry and for the wider field of literary theory and the history of ideas.

Through this chapter’s discussion of some of Wordsworth’s writings, particularly his poem “The Thorn” and the final (1802) version of his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, I aim to demonstrate that these texts bring to the fore problems regarding the ways in which one cares, that is to say, how one relates to the world. Wordsworth’s texts do this, I contend, by raising issues—pertaining to phenomenology, epistemology, and ethics—which are philosophically linked to David Hume’s works and to his scepticism and moral sentimentalism in particular. I argue that Wordsworth’s texts point out the pitfalls, paucity, and limitations of certain ways of caring, and that they put forward an alternative way of relating to things that forestalls these problems or leads out of them. I show how this other way of being is also characteristic of the poet such as Emerson and Heidegger describe them, and how it pertains to the German philosopher’s concept of authentic care. In doing so, I establish a continuity between, on the one hand, Wordsworth’s poetic presentation of—and response to—philosophical problems, and, on the other hand, Emerson and Heidegger’s ideas on poets and poetry. Establishing this continuity involves not only engaging with Wordsworth scholars, but also discussing claims made about Romanticism as such, particularly those put forward by Stanley Cavell. Indeed, not only does Cavell uphold that Romanticism—particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge’s works—constitutes a response to scepticism, he also argues that both Emerson and Heidegger’s works contain philosophical theorisations of Romantic ideas. Both these claims I eventually explain and discuss so as to ascertain the extent to which some of the origins of the idea that poetry manifests care may be found in Wordsworth’s works.

Mapping out, in Chapter One, the idea that poetry, as Heidegger writes about it, is a manifestation of care, has implied demonstrating the relevance, for discussions about literary theory and poetic works, of ideas pertaining, on the one hand, to phenomenology—and phenomenological epistemology, defined as what we infer or understand about the world given our experience of it—as well as, on the other hand, to ethics—not only because care is term used within that field, but also because Heidegger writes about inter-subjective relationships of concern and solicitude. So as to demonstrate that some of the origins of the idea that poetry manifests care are visible in Wordsworth’s works, this investigation

must therefore establish that ideas pertaining to those same branches of philosophy are present in this British poet's works.

### 1. Phenomenology and Epistemology in Wordsworth's Works

In his 1815 "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (to his *Poems, in Two Volumes*), Wordsworth writes: "The appropriate business of poetry, (which, nevertheless, if genuine, is as permanent as pure science,) her appropriate employment, her privilege and her *duty*, is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear*; not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*" (*Prose*, 3: 63). Such words, including the key ones that Wordsworth stresses, link poetry not to ontology, but to phenomenology, that is to say, poetry is to convey a knowledge not of things in themselves but of things as they are experienced or felt—as they "*seem*" to be, as they "*appear*," through the "*senses*" and to the "*passions*." However, at the beginning of the "Preface" that the above essay supplements, Wordsworth seems to make a different claim:

The powers requisite for the production of poetry are: first, those of Observation and Description,—*i.e.*, the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer; . . . its exercise supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects, much in the same way as a translator or engraver ought to be to his original. (*Prose*, 3:26)

There appears to be a contradiction between the requirement "to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves" mentioned in this passage and the aforementioned duty "to treat things . . . not as they exist in themselves." Since the latter statement from the "Essay" is more recent than the one from the "Preface" it supplements, this indicates that Wordsworth's views changed, as Tim Milnes points out in *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose*: "This signals a [sic] important departure for Wordsworth's theory. Whereas in the past he had striven to articulate a special, non-scientific way by which poetry might approach 'things as they are', here that project is relinquished completely" (96). As Milnes points, the passage above suggests an ontological project—an access to, and an intention to convey, the fundamental being of a thing—which is not scientific insofar as it implies "the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects," as opposed to active scientific work such as manipulation and experimentation. However, in spite of that non-scientific passivity or letting oneself be worked upon (to

borrow Emerson's words<sup>46</sup>), this passage from the "Preface" suggests that poets are able to achieve a detachment and an objectivity ("unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind") that is characteristic of the scientific stance, and which both Heidegger and Emerson condemn—notably because it implies a separation of subject from object and an objectification of things.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, Wordsworth's words from the "Essay"—particularly his idea of considering things "as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*"—are an invitation to eschew the aforementioned detachment and attempt at objectivity in order to pay attention to, and to convey, the human experience of things. This more phenomenological approach, and the idea that the poet should thereby be able to access and convey something "as permanent as pure science" contains the premises of the Heideggerian notion that ontological truths are accessed and conveyed by a phenomenological kind of poetry.

Although such a way of interpreting Wordsworth's statements points out how his ideas contain some of the origins of Heidegger's views, it is a reading that stresses that there is change, even a contradiction between the ideas in the "Preface" and those in the "Essay" that supplements it. A less radical or divisive reading—one that attempts to reconcile the two texts and to explain their complementariness—is worth discussing in addition to the one above, as it explains how the poet's "ability" to pay close attention to things themselves, as stated in the "Preface," is compatible with, and useful for, the fulfilling of the poet's "*duty*" to focus on experience, as argued in the "Essay." Indeed, strictly speaking, when Wordsworth argues in the "Preface" that the poet must be able to observe things in a detached and objective way, he is not writing about what poems or poets *do*, but about an ability that poets must have, i.e., a prerequisite. In other words, the "ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves" is a skill that poets must have, but what their poems should do—their "*duty*"—is convey how things are experienced. According to this reading, powers of "Observation and Description" are required as a tool that the poet uses so as to discern both how "passion or feeling existing in the mind" colour and affect one's perception and understanding of things—how they are part and parcel of the latter—and how things can, in turn, trigger or stir up such "passion or

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<sup>46</sup> Emerson's idea that "we are not to do, but to let do; not to work, but to let be worked upon" (*Essays* 1061) is discussed in Chapter Two of this investigation.

<sup>47</sup> For instance, according to Heidegger, poetry ought to achieve a "rescue of things from mere objectness," (*Poetry* 127) as pointed out in Chapter One of this study.

feeling.” The ability to pay close attention to things is a skill that allows the poet to study carefully our interactions with things, including how they affect the mind, how faculties like reason, the imagination, beliefs, habits, and emotions all interact with sensory input from “things as they are in themselves” so as to produce one’s experience of those things.

Moreover, in another prose work, an essay fragment known as “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” Wordsworth likewise enjoins “the philosopher” not to “grope about in the external world” but to “look into his own mind”: “The true province of the philosopher is not to grope about in the external world &, when he has perceived or detected in an object such or such a quality or power, to set himself the task of persuading the world that such is a sublime or beautiful object, but to look into his own mind & determine the law by which he is affected” (*Prose*, 2:357). What matters, for both poets and philosophers, is how things are experienced, how they affect the mind and trigger, for instance, feelings of the sublime and the beautiful: *that* reality is the “business” of poetry (to quote the aforementioned supplementary essay) as well as what philosophy should study according to Wordsworth. Sentences such as that one from the fragment on the sublime and the beautiful lead Richard Eldridge, in an article entitled “Wordsworth and ‘A New Condition of Philosophy,’” to write the following about the fragment: “Wordsworth throughout the fragment condemns all efforts to achieve an understanding of our best possibilities of human life that require us to step outside human experience so as to see the world as it is, as it were, in itself” (55). Eldridge’s words are a further indication that Wordsworth anticipates some of Heidegger’s views insofar as a similar condemnation of efforts to step outside phenomenology, or “human experience,” pervades *Being and Time*, for instance.<sup>48</sup> Several ideas pervading Heidegger’s works—not only an emphasis on paying close attention to human experience, to our interactions with things, but also a call for both philosophers and poets to study and write about these—are therefore expressed in Wordsworth’s writings. To my knowledge, Heidegger never read any of the above prose texts by Wordsworth, but he read and wrote extensively about Romantic poets such Friedrich Hölderlin, so all the while studying the British poet’s ideas, this investigation must ask the question of the

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<sup>48</sup> This focus on one’s experience is partly responsible for a blindness that Jerome J. McGann points out in *The Romantic Ideology* as it comes with the risk of a lack of focus on others, on how different their experience may be, or on factual socio-historical realities. The latter, including other people, can, as a result of this focus on experience, end up being used as mere means—means of being affected, of exploring one’s feelings, and so on. My reading of Wordsworth’s poem “The Thorn,” in the second half of this chapter, suggests that this poem points out and warns against this pitfall. I discuss these points and on McGann’s views in more detail in another footnote later on in this chapter.

extent to which the latter are characteristic of a larger philosophical and artistic trend or movement—Romanticism.

In order to understand how both Wordsworth and Heidegger's ideas pertain to this larger trend, Andrew Bowie's following words, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, prove helpful; about "the emergence via Romantic theory of the idea that works of art are bearers of truth" (16), he writes:

For this to be the case a change away from the notion of truth as 'representation', as the adequacy of correspondence of mental concept or proposition to its object, a notion which probably dates back at least as far as Aristotle, must take place. This change in the concept of truth is linked to the move away from a conception of art as mimesis towards the idea of art as a revelation or 'disclosure' of the world. (16-7)

Bowie points out that Romanticism is characterised by a shift whereby art is no longer understood as providing imperfect copies, or re-presentations, of things ("art as mimesis"), but as disclosing a truth that would otherwise remain hidden ("art as revelation"). That is to say, the truth of things, i.e., what they *are*, is no longer perceived as something that is best beheld im-mediately—for example, in order to get a sense of what Ben Nevis *is*, it is best to see it first-hand than to see a painting of it—but as something that the artist allows one to see or hear—a painting of Ben Nevis discloses more of what Ben Nevis really *is*, compared to what one would perceive from looking at the real mountain. As discussed in Chapter One of this investigation, Heidegger writes about poetry and art as disclosure (*aletheia*) in his later writings, including by describing Van Gogh's painting of a pair of shoes in order to support his arguments in "The Origin of the Work of Art." Wordsworth's aforementioned—and apparently contradictory—ideas about poets and poetry are an indication of a shift from one conception of art to the other, or rather, they attempt to salvage the skills and ideas valued by an understanding of art as mimesis and to reconcile them with an understanding of art as revelation. Bowie writes above of a "move" "away from" and "towards," which implies a continuum, or the idea of a gradual shift like the one discernible in Wordsworth's texts. Thus, the "world" that the poem reveals, that is to say, the one that requires poetry in order to be disclosed according Wordsworth, is not the so-called objective or factual one, but the one that is experienced. Poetry neither simply mimics the realm of matter, nor does it claim to reveal some immaterial, mystical or ethereal truths from a separate realm of ideas; rather, poetry discloses the world humans experience, the one that is the meeting point, or the result of the encounter between mind and matter or subject and object.

Referring to Aristotle's poetics, Wordsworth further explains his views on the truths that poetry discloses in the following passage from his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (the later, 1802 edition): "Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony . . ." (*Prose*, 1:139). By claiming that the "object" of poetry is "truth . . . general and operative," Wordsworth argues that what poetry studies, conveys or reveals is just as universal ("not individual and local") and has just as much relevance or agency throughout the world ("operative") as general laws of nature. Moreover, the "primary laws of our nature" is what Wordsworth aims at "tracing" in his poetry, as he argues earlier in that same "Preface" (*Prose*, 1:123). However, whereas universal truths or laws are traditionally attained and conveyed, scientifically, through detached rational reasoning, Wordsworth offers truth "carried into the heart by passion," that is to say, poetry is a disclosure or revelation of truth through the passions, of truth as it is felt or experienced, of how it manifests itself in our bodies and through our feelings. Wordsworth thus uses the traditional view of art as *mimesis*, as truthful representation, to assert the idea that the phenomenological revelations of poetry—since it deals with how things appear and are experienced—are true. That is to say, what poetry reveals about how things are experienced is true, Wordsworth argues, precisely because the poet has representative powers of observation and description, i.e., because poetry is truthful representation (of that experience). It is through the poem's re-presentation of experience that truths are both conveyed and disclosed since the emotion or "passion"—that is part both of human experience and of poetry—is what ferries and reveals truth. The latter is "carried alive into the heart" where it is felt and lived—instead of being contemplated from a distance with the mind's eye. Wordsworth further explains this as follows: "The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (*Prose*, 1:141). Whereas truth is "remote," far from the detached "Man of science" whose stance places truth at a remove (hence the "solitude"), the poet, by contrast, is close to the truth their work discloses. They recognise—and "rejoices" at—their experience as the *locus* or harbour, of truth, which their "song" discloses. This proximate "presence of truth"—that is to say, the fact that, like



the song, truth arises from “hourly” human experience—means that “all human beings” are invited to, and are fundamentally able to, “join” the poet in their truth-revealing singing.<sup>49</sup>

Not only does Wordsworth’s interest, as a poet, lie in how we experience the world, i.e. how things appear to us, he also anticipates some of Heidegger’s phenomenological arguments in *Being and Time*. Indeed, just as the latter philosopher explains that we always already interpret things and that we do not first and foremost experience meaningless sensory input, the poet likewise argues (again in the later edition of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*) that “immediate knowledge” and “certain convictions” colour our experiences and interactions with things our surroundings: “What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other . . . he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions” (*Prose*, 1:140). That “ordinary life” should contain “a certain quantity of immediate knowledge” is a view Heidegger also holds, as Chapter One of this investigation pointed out; it means that we are *a priori* (immediately) immersed in a meaningful network of relationships. In arguing that there is a two-way relationship between people and things (“acting and re-acting upon each other”), Wordsworth suggests that people’s understandings of things and their relationships with them are informed not only by the input they get from things, but also from whatever beliefs and preconceptions (“convictions, intuitions”) they bring to those things. That is to say, how we experienced them—what they seem to be for us—is also partly shaped, or determined, by us. If the poet “considers,” i.e., contemplates, studies, and reflects upon this and the way this happens—thanks to their superior powers of observation and description—what they do in and through their poetry—what their duty and business is—is to disclose, or reveal, the wealth of meanings, of interpretations, of responses—including passionate, emotional ones—that emerge from this interaction.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> There are also Christian overtones to Wordsworth’s statement: with the poet as with Jesus, truth (God’s) is no longer remote and passed down as a kind of (scientific) law from a “remote and unknown benefactor,” it becomes a “visible and hourly companion,” (voiced or sung by the poet or Jesus), hence the rejoicing at that proximity and presence in our midst.

<sup>50</sup> While I stress the relationship between this line of thinking and the phenomenological one put forward by Heidegger, critics such as Harold Bloom have characterised it in more psychological terms as an exploration of the “relation between nature and consciousness,” which Bloom sees as central to Romanticism as a whole – a statement that is discussed and qualified by Stanley Cavell (*In Quest*

What the poet is to do, moreover, is not to convey that knowledge, that wealth of meanings and responses, from an external point of view, as some detached and rational philosopher, but to manifest it, to bring that *aletheia* about—through *mimesis*, as a representative of the kind of person the poet has observed and studied. The poet's own text should therefore also be imbued with, and should convey, feelings, beliefs, and preconceptions. Another passage from the same "Preface" thus reads:

. . . while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs. . . . *Prose*, 1:138

Wordsworth warns that the poet's attentiveness to, and transcription of, experience—her "employment" as he "imitates passions"—is an activity that may become and feel, to the reader, artificial and "mechanical" if it is too detached from experience. If the latter is to be truly revealed, the poet must "bring his feelings near," which means that the poet has to manifest a close and heartfelt attentiveness which is the opposite of the distant and detached stance of the scientist. The poet's emotional proximity is a receptive one, a "let[ing] himself slip into" a state that is the opposite of the one adopted by rational subject seeking to study an object with the mind's eye; instead the poet must abolish that subject-object distinction and "confound and identify his own feelings with theirs." In and through the poem, thanks to such a "delusion," readers get to witness a manifestation of precisely that which is the object of the poet's study: how one experiences and relates to things, including through one's feelings and beliefs. Beholding this, "the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened," Wordsworth writes earlier in the same "Preface" (*Prose*, 1:127), and the reader will realise how, for instance "our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts" (*Prose*, 1:127). Through *mimesis*, the poem therefore manifests and conveys the potentially confused, inarticulate, superstitious or emotional dimensions of our relationships to, and of our understandings of, things—which is something a philosophical treatise cannot do.<sup>51</sup> Wordsworth's writings on poetry—more specifically, his ideas that poetry should manifest how we relate to things and experience them—therefore contain some of the ideas at the core of Heidegger's views about phenomenology, care, and poetry's superiority to traditional philosophical writing. Indeed,

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45). Edward T. Duffy's article "Cavell and Wordsworth: Illuminating Romanticism" has more on this discussion and on the complementary nature of such views.

<sup>51</sup> I discuss Wordsworth's views on this particular point further down.

the latter kind of prose is unable to manifest the complexity of our feeling-and-belief-laden understandings of and relationships to things; it often presumes and seeks to filter out some of that complexity, such as emotions and preconceptions, and to appeal mostly to rational reasoning. Such an acknowledgement of the limitations of traditional philosophy and of its use of language is both part of Wordsworth's argument regarding poetry's role and potential, and is central to Heidegger's his turn away from more conventional modes of philosophical writing, of which the unfinished *Being and Time* is an example, and towards the more poetic modes of his later works, which include poems.

Noticing this overlap between Wordsworth and Heidegger begs the question of its reasons in the context of Romanticism: what philosophical reasons or influences play into the acknowledgement of the limitations of traditional philosophy all the while opening up the possibility that poetry may overcome those limitations and reveal truths which philosophy cannot express? Asking this question also means asking, in the aforementioned terms Bowie uses about Romanticism: what leads Wordsworth to understand poetry no longer simply as *mimesis*, but also as *aletheia*, as disclosing truths, especially about appearances and experience, about our relationships to the world? I understand some of the philosophical foundations of Wordsworth's views—and of the idea that poetry manifests care—to lie in, and to lie in reaction to, the philosophy of David Hume. In putting this idea forward, I follow in the footsteps not only of Stanley Cavell, for whom Romanticism constitutes a response to scepticism, but also of scholars such as Tim Milnes, who provides an extensive exploration of how British Romanticism dealt with the legacies of David Hume's ideas. Briefly exploring Hume's works and Wordsworth's post-Humean poetics will allow me to highlight some of the philosophical foundations both of Wordsworth's ideas and of the idea that poetry manifests care. There are two main aspects of Hume's philosophy that Wordsworth's works respond to or resonate with, and which also play into the idea of poetry as a manifestation of care; the first has to do with Hume's epistemology in relation to the phenomenological ideas discussed above, the second with the Scottish philosopher's moral sentimentalism and how it is linked to the notion of authentic care.

## **2. Hume's Scepticism and Sympathy**

In *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume assesses the means by which we experience reality and whether we can claim to know anything based on that experience: "custom

operates before we have time for reflexion. . . . experience may produce a belief and a judgment of causes and effects by a secret operation, and without being once thought of. . . . [T]he understanding or imagination can draw inferences from past experience, without reflecting on it; much more without forming any principle concerning it, or reasoning upon that principle" (*Treatise* 104). By pointing out how non reflexive our "inferences" are, how unconscious or "secret" the processes by which we "produce a belief and a judgement of causes and effects," Hume provides some of the foundations of phenomenological claims, such as Heidegger's about how our relationships to the world are a priori meaning-laden and interpretative and only a posteriori detached, reflexive, or analytical. Hume moreover adds that "[t]he memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas" (*Treatise* 265). This means that the sense we make of our past and present experiences, including sensory ones, is based ("founded") on imaginative associations of ideas that have a life of their own (a "vivacity"). Hume thus concludes the first part of his *Treatise on Human Nature* by pointing out how we rely on "custom," or habit, how imperfect reason is, and how the imagination plays a central, fundamental role in our understanding. Without its foundation (the imagination) the understanding cannot lead us to draw conclusions: "the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life" (*Treatise* 267). Trying to separate the understanding from its foundation and letting strictly rational reasoning assess the logical soundness of a thought means the understanding "acts alone" and leaves us in a circle of inconclusive doubting and uncertainty, as it prevents us from forming beliefs—since even the notion of cause and effect rests on the imagination. This is paralysing for anyone wishing to know what can be known with certainty, as Hume points out:

Shall we, then, establish it for a general maxim, that no refin'd or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv'd? . . . We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all. For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. I can only observe what is commonly done; which is, that this difficulty is seldom or never thought of; and even where it has once been present to the mind, is quickly forgot, and leaves but a small impression behind it. (*Treatise* 268)

Hume's stresses the imperfect nature of our understanding—if logical, rational, irrefutable reasoning is considered perfection—by describing our situation as one where we have to make do with "a false reason." This is a paralysing thought ("I know not what ought to be done") insofar as the philosopher realises that his quest for an entirely rational and purely

reason-based knowledge cannot proceed any further. The only way to get out of this dead-end, for the knowledge-seeking philosopher, is to fall back on “what is commonly done.” Hume begins to do this by noticing how un-problematic his situation ordinarily is. Indeed, if this “difficulty” is “quickly forgot” and “leaves but a small impression behind it,” it is because our ordinary relations to things, people, and the world around us, are not characterised by quests for rational certainties. The absence of flawlessly logical truths is not a problem for how we “commonly” do things, so acknowledging that the imagination and habit are part of our understanding—and letting-go of a strict requirement for purely rational truths—is a necessity (“[w]e have . . . no choice”).

Such radical scepticism, and the inability to know “what ought to be done” that results from it, was a significant influence on British Romantic authors such as Wordsworth, as Tim Milnes argues in *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose*:

For the English Romantics (putting Coleridge to one side for a moment), the most pressing concern was not dissatisfaction with the security of Kant’s pact between understanding and reason, but the question of whether a certain kind of empiricism – a kind that seemed constitutionally prone to slip into scepticism – was worth saving from itself, or whether, in the absence of transcendental safety-nets, the quest for knowledge (for causes, grounds, first principles) should be abandoned wholesale. From this vantage point, the shadow of Hume looms larger than that of Kant. (12)

Milnes suggests that Hume’s conclusions puts the English Romantics in a position of being tempted to abandon the quest for knowledge because of the aforementioned paralysis—scepticism’s—which such a quest is “prone to slip into.” Statements by Hume, such as the ones from the passage above, are a philosophical invitation to acknowledge and make do with one’s experience and with the central roles that the imagination, associations of ideas, beliefs, and custom play in our relationships with the world, in our understanding and how we make sense of our experience. Wordsworth’s poem “The Thorn,” as my analysis of it shows, testifies to such an acknowledgement and explores its implications. Hume himself puts forward abandoning “the quest for knowledge” as a remedy or cure to scepticism’s paralysing grip; assailed by sceptic questions, he indeed describes the sceptical impasse and his way out of it as follows:

What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv’d of the use of every member and faculty.

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium,

either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther. (*Treatise* 269)

The forsaking of a rational quest for knowledge in favour of ordinary behaviours—and the benefit of doing so—is here unambiguously advocated by a philosopher who initially set out on precisely such a quest. Ordinary tasks, even ludic, unproductive ones are here put forward and valued, while the rigorous rational work of the thinker is described as a kind of illness or “delirium” leading to “ridiculous” “speculation” which “nature,” and ordinary behaviour, “cures.” The attitude that saves Hume from the “deepest darkness” is moreover a submission to “nature,” a letting-go or a “relaxing” of one’s “bent mind.” It is a yielding to what lies beyond the philosopher’s rational control since he further adds: “I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding” (*Treatise* 269). The language of illness as well as the idea of “clouds” being dispelled by an attitude of submission and letting-go suggests that strict rational thinking leads to scepticism and constitutes an obstacle to clarity—and obstacle, darkness, or cloud that “reason” is “incapable” of lifting. The a “relaxing” and “yield[ing]” Hume advocates is also characteristic of the stances of Emerson and Heidegger’s figures of the poet, so finding it in Hume’s work suggests that his turn away from philosophy’s strictly rational quest for knowledge constitutes one of the origins of Emerson and Heidegger’s views—notably of their valuing of the poet’s non-scientific and un-Cartesian stance.

Hume’s philosophy thus highlights the limitations of rational philosophical reasoning and the impasse of radical scepticism all the while pointing out the benefits brought about by the abandonment of such a quest for knowledge and a turn towards ordinary ways of being. Anne-Lise François thus writes, in “To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience”: “His critique of abstract thought—the impasse to which reason when taken alone always leads—is finally most important as a way of returning us to something fundamentally uncritical and inarticulate about our more usual ways of going about things” (140). The latter—what is “fundamentally uncritical and inarticulate about our more usual ways of going about things”—is what Heidegger’s phenomenological investigation (*Being and Time*) explores, as Chapter One demonstrated, which further suggests that Emerson’s “critique of abstract thought” constitutes one of the origins of the ideas discussed in the

first two chapters of this investigation. Although Hume's return to "more usual ways of going about things" is a means of recovering a form of intellectual balance and sanity—the above passages ultimately lead to a praise of the benefits of moderate forms of scepticism—his philosophy, along with his turn towards agreeable forms of leisure, constitutes an acknowledgement of "fundamentally uncritical and inarticulate" relationships to the world as well as the recognition of their necessity and of the benefits that come with the awareness and acceptance of these. Some of the origins of Wordsworth's—and, eventually, of Heidegger's—turn towards, and interest in, relationships to the world that are less reflexive, analytical, or articulate, lie in this acknowledgement, by Hume, of the inevitable, necessary, and even beneficial dimensions of such ways of being and thinking, and of the limitations of radically analytical and sceptical philosophical reasoning. Having considered Hume's epistemology, and before turning to Wordsworth's texts in order to further connect them with the latter and with the notion of care, another aspect of the British philosopher's works—one which is more directly linked to care—calls for attention: his moral sentimentalism and his arguments about our relationships with other people.

Wordsworth explores, in his poetry, our ordinary ways of behaving and understanding that Hume acknowledges and values as remedies to scepticism. According to Milnes, poetic creation thus constitutes the "Romantic answer" to Hume's turning towards games and other forms of pleasant recreation. Indeed, Milnes writes about the "abandonment of knowledge (and thus philosophizing) in favour of other modes of 'being'," (73) and about how "[f]oremost among these is the Romantic answer to Hume's philosophy-indifferent recreational pursuits of backgammon, wine and friends: poetic creation" (73). Poems, which are just as imaginative and irrational as the human understanding, reveal the maelstrom of experience, as a mirror reveals us to ourselves; it thus abides by the philosophical injunction 'know thyself' all the while avoiding the pitfalls of philosophy's rational attempts at reaching unshakable knowledge about things. By focusing on things as they appear and by turning to uncritical modes of being and thinking, poetry as Wordsworth understands it discloses truths that are phenomenological and that are consistent with Hume's conclusions about the human understanding. As Taylor Schey puts it in his doctoral dissertation entitled *After Skepticism: Hume and the Political Aesthetics of Romanticism*, "Wordsworth offers a productive way of thinking about relationality that eschews epistemological and ontological certainty" (19). That is to say,

knowledge and definitions of what things *are* that claim to be definitive and objective are not the focus of poetry; Wordsworth's poetry does not claim to provide fundamental and rational metaphysical knowledge of the world. Instead it seeks to convey—and thereby to provide if not a knowledge, at least an awareness of—how the world is related to, perceived and interpreted, including through the senses and passions. Poetry reveals the wealth of unreliable and uncertain meanings and interpretations that emerge from our experiences and relationships to things.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in paying careful attention to things as they appear to us, how our understanding interprets them, and how we relate to things, poetry not only brings into focus how we *care*—in Heidegger's sense of this word—it also opens up the possibility for *authentic* care, for an ethical relationship analogous to Heidegger's description of helpful solicitude, involving respectfully listening and letting-be.

This connection with ethics is highlighted by Adam Potkay in an article entitled "Wordsworth's Ethical Thinking" where he lists several ethical imperatives that he understands Wordsworth to be putting forward:

Do not derogate or act presumptuously towards others, but rather 'leave in quiet'—an aim that Wordsworth assigns to poetic language itself ('Essays on Epitaphs', 3, *PrW*, II. 85). Finally, do not distort, but rather look steadily and listen attentively. 'I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject', Wordsworth claims in the 1800 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (*PrW*, I. 132). This endeavour has a poetic component: it is what bookish poets fail to do, indulging instead in outworn artifice and cliché. The effort to look steadily also has an ethical grounding: it is what all of us ought to do in daily life, in attending to the face of things, either natural environments or the visages of strangers. (680)

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<sup>52</sup> This, however, may in turn lead to the temptation to view art as a means of reclaiming knowledge, of accessing the fundamental truths that rational reasoning cannot reach, of understanding what things fundamentally *are*. Such a temptation constitutes a slip from mere phenomenological explorations towards ontological claims about noumenal things-in-themselves, and it is a temptation that partly corresponds to what Stanley Cavell's puts under the umbrella term "animism" (*In Quest* 53). By claiming to reach a fundamental knowledge of things through art, such a slippage has "given in to skepticism"—just as much as Hume and other "epistemologists who think to refute skepticism by undertaking a defense of ordinary beliefs, perhaps suggesting that there is a sense in which they are certain, or sufficiently probably for human purposes," as Cavell explains (*In Quest* 4)—precisely because it buys into the premise that there is a fundamental knowledge that needs to be accessed. About Hazlitt and Wordsworth, Milnes likewise suggests that they remain gripped by a desire for truth characteristic of scepticism because they "challenge the foundations of representational 'knowledge' with a theory of creation, a challenge to epistemology which finally loops back to the same desideratum of epistemic certainty from which it seeks to escape" (27). When representation claims to disclose truth, to provide knowledge, it carries the risk of slipping from phenomenology—claiming to disclose truths about experience and relationships to things—to ontology—understood as definitive definitions of what is, and of what things fundamentally are. Heidegger's works break up this distinction, like that between subjectivity and objectivity, by arguing that what things are *is* the result of our relationship to them, and not some metaphysical, noumenal thing-in-itself.



Potkay writes about “daily life” because the ordinary is what Wordsworth stresses in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*—he writes that the poet “considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life,” as was previously pointed out (*Prose*, 1:140). Representing those ordinary relationships to things and people through poetry allows Wordsworth to bring into focus our inferences, assumptions, preconceptions, our non-reflexive and affective reactions—thereby raising the question of “what all of us ought to do,” of how we attend “to the face of things,” as Potkay puts it. The educative dimension of holding up a mirror showing us the ways in which things appear to us and how we relate to them is highlighted by Wordsworth when he writes, as was previously quoted: “the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified” (*Prose*, 1:127). Wordsworth mentions “affections” because unlike philosophy—that brings to our attention how things appear to us in a detached or intellectual way by speaking to the reader’s reason by ways of demonstrations and arguments—poetry is able to *manifest* the ways in which we relate to things. That is to say, the mirror poetry presents to us does not merely get us to think about how we care, it is able to convey the passions that are part and parcel of our relationships to things. Poetry affects us, and through that affective impact it has the potential to affect how we care, which is why Wordsworth mentions the reader’s “affections strengthened and purified” by poetry.

Poetry therefore has the potential to succeed where philosophy fails, as Wordsworth suggests in the following passage from a fragment known as “Essay on Morals”:

I know no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds, & thence to have any influence worth our notice in forming those habits of which I am speaking. . . . These moralists attempt to strip the mind of all its old clothing when their object ought to be to furnish it with new. All this is the consequence of an undue value set upon that faculty which we call reason. . . . [B]ald & naked reasonings are impotent over our habits, they cannot form them; from the same cause they are equally powerless in regulating our judgements concerning the value of men & things. They contain no picture of human life; they *describe* nothing. (*Prose*, 1:103)

By stressing “describe” at the end of that passage and by using the metaphor of philosophers stripping the mind of its clothing, Wordsworth highlights the value of artistic representation, of a *mimesis* that conveys a “picture of human life” complete with the non-reflexive emotional responses and irrational beliefs that “furnish” or clothe ordinary human experience. Commenting on the above passage, Potkay thus writes: “Wordsworth’s

implication is that an imaginative literature that describes life with sufficient power can succeed, where philosophy fails, in forming the habit of virtue” (685-6). Indeed, if “reasonings are impotent” and “powerless” when it comes to making us change our “habits,” as Wordsworth puts it, is because, as Hume explains: “reason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition, . . . [and] the same faculty is as incapable of preventing volition, or of disputing the preference with any passion or emotion” (*Treatise* 414).<sup>53</sup> If poetry can succeed where philosophy fails, it is therefore because poetry is able to appeal to the passions: by *manifesting* care, it provides us with a pleasant experience of the non-reflexive and emotional ways in which we understand and relate to the world, and it is this pleasing solicitation of the passions that can have influence on *how* we care.

Hume thus argues that “[t]he chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain; and when these sensations are remov’d, both from our thought and feeling, we are, in a great measure, incapable of passion or action, of desire or volition” (*Treatise* 574). The passions—and pleasant feelings in particular—move us, including to moral action, both according to Hume and to Wordsworth. Hume’s ideas, particularly those about the lack of potency of reason and about the converse power the passions have to move us to action, partly explain why, in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes that “The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure” (*Prose*, 1:139). Indeed, according to Wordsworth, pleasure is what moves to feel sympathy for someone, as he explains:

[I]t is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. (*Prose*, 1:140)

Giving pleasure to the reader through poetry is therefore necessary, according to Wordsworth, for several reasons. By having the reader feel pleasure, the poet reveals—by providing a mirror feeling of—how a human being “knows, and feels, and lives, and moves.” As Michael Mason puts it in his edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, commenting, in a note, on the

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<sup>53</sup> In the third part of his *Treatise*, Hume moreover adds: “Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv’d from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov’d, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason” (*Treatise* 457).

“Preface”: “Wordsworth claims that in the pleasure afforded by the aesthetic aspect of poetry (with a special emphasis here on metre) there is profound fidelity to the human experience of the world; in other words, something like a lyrical ballad – an image of ordinary, troubled humanity cast into rhythm and rhyme – captures the quality of our response to life” (55n). Pleasure is how poetry reveals its truth, i.e., it is the means by which it conveys “the human experience of the world” with “profound fidelity.” Not only is pleasure part of experience in the way that a warm cup of tea is agreeable, pleasure is, according to Wordsworth, a fundamental part of our experience of the world insofar as we come to conclusions regarding the world, be it ordinarily or scientifically, through pleasure: “knowledge” is “built up by pleasure.” The sense we make of our experience the world, the empirical knowledge we draw from it—such as concluding that standing in the sun makes us feel warmer than standing in the shade—“exists in us by pleasure alone.” Providing pleasure through poetry thus means providing a pathway to knowledge about the world and about oneself: only by providing pleasure to readers will the poet lead those readers towards an awareness of how of how they care. That revelation of how we experience, respond to, and understand the world has to happen through pleasure according to Wordsworth.

Moreover, as with other conclusions that we draw about the world, “sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure,” which means that what we understand someone else to be feeling is arrived at, “propagated,” via pleasure. Unlike philosophy, which solicits the faculty of reason, poetry solicits this faculty of sympathy and is therefore able to manifest how we care towards other people, which means it has the potential to foster solicitous, authentic care. Indeed, sympathy, pleasure, and morality are all linked according to Hume: “sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions,” he writes (*Treatise* 618), and “moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure” (*Treatise* 574).<sup>54</sup> To take a simple example, if we witness someone beating up someone else, sympathy will allow us to surmise that the person being beaten

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<sup>54</sup> Hume further stresses the importance of sympathy in the following passage: “Thus it appears, *that* sympathy is a very powerful principle in human nature, *that* it has a great influence on our taste of beauty, and *that* it produces our sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues. From thence we may presume, that it also gives rise to many of the other virtues; and that qualities acquire our approbation, because of their tendency to the good of mankind. This presumption must become a certainty, when we find that most of those qualities, which we *naturally* approve of, have actually that tendency, and render a man a proper member of society” (*Treatise* 577-8).

up is feeling pain and we will judge the beating up to be bad. In other words, paying close attention to another person is the best way in which one can get a sense of what that person is feeling and, consequently to make moral distinctions between what is virtuous and what is not. “[M]orality is determined by sentiment,” Hume writes in “Appendix 1” to *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (85); “[i]t defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*; and vice the contrary” (85-6). Sympathy is thus also what leads us to understand that, in the previous example, it would be morally good to alleviate the suffering by going to that person’s help; sympathy “has force sufficient to give us the strongest sentiments of approbation, when it operates alone, without the concurrence of any other principle,” Hume moreover argues (Treatise 618). Wordsworth’s agreement with such connections between pleasure and morality, and what Milnes calls “Wordsworth’s belief in the cognitive and moral seriousness of poetry” (84) are also perceptible in the aforementioned fragment known as “Essay on Morals.” In it, he writes that “We do not argue in defence of our good actions, we feel internally their beneficent effect; we are satisfied with this delicious sensation; & even when we are called upon to justify our conduct, we perform the task with languor and indifference” (Prose, 1:104). In other words, unlike the passions (what we “feel internally”), rational reasoning is not what leads us to act in a virtuous way, which is why we derive uncritical and inarticulate pleasure (a “delicious sensation”) from our virtuous actions all the while struggling to provide logical and articulate justifications for them.

Poetry can thus foster authentic care—and can do so better than philosophy—precisely because it can manifest it, by re-creating and thereby revealing our sympathetic and impassioned responses to the world. As Milnes puts it, commenting on Wordsworth’s above “Essay on Morals,” Wordsworth believes that “where philosophy has failed to lead because of its lack of sympathetic power, poetry can succeed” (84). This moral potential of art and superior ability to “lead” due to its “sympathetic power” is hinted at by Hume in the following passage which disputes the notion of an abstract “universal affection of mankind”:

In general, it may be affirm’d, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself. ’Tis true, there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in

lively colours: But this proceeds merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such an universal affection to mankind. . . . (*Treatise* 481)

We are affected—we necessarily *sympathise* “in some measure” Hume claims—when someone’s pain or pleasure (“happiness or misery”) is “represented in lively colours,” such as in a painting or a poem, precisely because art stimulates the senses, awakens our passions, and solicits sympathy in a way that a philosophical imperative or a maxim cannot. A poem that would bring “near to us,” through representation “in lively colours,” somebody’s suffering, therefore has the potential to foster solicitude—which pertains to authentic care—because, as it is able to “affect us” through sympathy, it has the ability to awaken the passions that move us to virtuous, moral action. Alan Grob thus explains in *The Philosophic Mind* how poetry can, according to Wordsworth, stimulate sympathy to moral ends:

Sympathy, then, stands as the most basic and most common of man’s moral resources, the seminal beginnings for Wordsworth of the ethical life. Even among those ordinary indifferent to the needs of others, the power of sympathy, when acted upon by a sufficiently compelling object, can in most cases prove stronger than the barriers of habit and thus dispose man to acts of true disinterestedness. (156)

Whereas “naked reasonings are impotent over our habits,” (*Prose*, 1:103) as Wordsworth puts it in a previously commented passage, sympathy can “prove stronger than the barriers of habit,” as Grob puts it above, because the passions can move us to moral action, including through the pleasure that poetry gives. Moreover, and as previously mentioned, poetry brings both to our minds and to our senses *how* we care; this, combined with the above benefits of stimulating the reader’s sympathy, means that poetry has the potential to foster more respectful ways of relating to things, more authentically caring relationships, and better moral responses. This idea of an improvement through—and of—both the passions and the reflective mind is conveyed in Wordsworth’s “the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified”: both the “understanding” and the “affections” are said to benefit from the poet’s work (*Prose*, 1:127).

### 3. “The Thorn”

Having studied some of Wordsworth’s prose texts about poetry and poets, this investigation now turns to one of his poems in order to determine whether, and how, his poetry concretely achieves the above, that is to say, how it manifests care and how it fosters solicitude and other such authentically caring relationships. I analyse only one

poem—but I study it in depth—since a thorough exploration of all of Wordsworth’s poems is beyond the scope of this investigation, and because aim of the latter is not to assess how systematically or repeatedly Wordsworth’s poetry achieves what he argues poetry ought to do. Moreover, if the analysis of one poem is sufficient to demonstrate how Wordsworth’s poetry is able to manifest care and foster authentic care, then two of the wider goals of this study, which are to demonstrate the relevance of the concept of care for poetics and to determine whether, and how, some of the origins of the notion that poetry manifests care are present in Wordsworth’s works, will also be achieved.

### 3.1 Critical Discussion

Three main reasons account for my choice to discuss “The Thorn,” published in *Lyrical Ballads*, amongst all of Wordsworth’s poems.<sup>55</sup> First, *Lyrical Ballads* contains a “Preface” (55) where Wordsworth lays out many of his views about poetry, and of all the poems in that collection, “The Thorn” is the poem about which he wrote the longest “Note” (37).<sup>56</sup> The poem is therefore accompanied by two texts that provide opportunities to analyse Wordsworth’s relationship to his poetry, its subject-matter, its purpose, and what he understands his poetry to be and to do. A second reason for choosing “The Thorn” is that, with this poem as with *Lyrical Ballads* and its “Preface,” a significant amount of secondary—and sometimes conflicting—criticism has been written about it.<sup>57</sup> Engaging with scholarly discussions of this poem is therefore a way for me to show that the critical tool of care, which I apply to this poem, has a place within existing poetic criticism, and that it is able to yield new interpretations and disclose additional layers of meaning in a poem. The third main reason for selecting “The Thorn” is that, as I argue in my analysis of it, it is a poem about how one cares. That is to say, not only is it about a man’s<sup>58</sup> relationship to

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<sup>55</sup> I have chosen to work with Michael Mason’s edition of *Lyrical Ballads* because it tracks the changes and additions that the collection underwent from its first 1798 edition through to its fourth 1805 edition, and it uses the latter edition as a reference for “The Thorn.” Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent citations of the poem will be from that edition, with stanza and line numbers provided instead of page numbers (119-27).

<sup>56</sup> The 1798 edition contained an “Advertisement” which was replaced, in 1800, both by the “Preface” and by “Notes,” including the one on “The Thorn.” The latter was reprinted in the 1802 and 1805 editions, while the 1800 “Preface” was expanded for the 1802 edition (and this longer version was retained for the 1805 edition).

<sup>57</sup> My work engages primarily with Stephen M. Parrish, Jerome Christensen, Paul D. Sheats, and W.J.B. Owen’s readings of “The Thorn,” but I also bring into my discussion arguments by Geoffrey H. Hartman, Neil Fraistat, Frederick Garber, Arnd Bohm, Michael Mason, Mary Jacobus, and Susan J. Wolfson.

<sup>58</sup> The poem makes it clear that the narrator is male: “I am a man,” (18.196).

something (a specific place with a thorn, pond, and mossy heap) and someone (a woman called Martha), it is a poem that interrogates those relationships, and more specifically the narrator's inability to care authentically—an inability partly due, I argue, to the narrator's scepticism. The poem also discusses the narrator's relationship to knowledge and superstition or hearsay regarding Martha and the place of the thorn: the narrator remains uncertain and trapped between conflicting stances—torn and hesitating between scepticism and animism—and he consequently fails to care authentically. I will explain later on and in more detail what I mean by this; what I want to stress at this point is that I understand "The Thorn" to be a reverse or negative image of the authentically caring figure that I have hewn out of Heidegger and Emerson's texts on poets and poetry. In other words, I argue that the poem fosters solicitude and authentic care by bringing into focus both its lack and the pitfalls, paucity, and limitations of other—less solicitous and more concerned—ways of caring.

That "The Thorn" is a poem about entrapment and failure to care authentically partly explains, I think, some of the negative criticism that the poem has received, including regarding its infamous lines: "I've measured it from side to side: / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide" (3.32-3).<sup>59</sup> That is to say, I agree with Paul D. Sheats' argument in "'Tis three feet long and two feet wide': Wordsworth's 'Thorn' and the Politics of Bathos" that even though these lines "have demonstrated a remarkable power to provoke readers into passionate resistance . . . this passage is something of a textual crux" (92). Just like the repetitions that riddle the poem, or its very first line (discussed below), these lines manifest the way in which the narrator cares. That is to say, the simplicity and stylistic paucity of these lines—criticised for their "unenduring banality," as James A. W. Heffernan points out (6)—convey and reflect the simplicity and paucity of the narrator's relationship to this place of the thorn—as well as the banality of their behaviour. If these lines have drawn harsh

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<sup>59</sup> Wordsworth altered these two lines for the 1820 collection of his poems in order for them to read "Though but of compass small, and bare / To thirsty suns and parching air" (*Miscellaneous* 205; *Poetical* 241). Wordsworth's decision to change these lines more than twenty years after he first wrote the poem does not invalidate my interpretation insofar as, at this early stage in the poem, the reader does not yet have a critical distance towards the narrator. Indeed, this critical stance towards the narrator starts to build up mostly once the second speaker appears after stanza eight, and as the narrator's repetitions, uncertainties, and reliance on hearsay accumulate (this is a point I discuss in further detail in the following two paragraphs). There is therefore a risk that the reader should consider these lines as poetically inferior, instead of interpreting them as expressing the narrator's simple and flawed understanding, and this may be why Wordsworth decided to change them (eventually yielding to the recurring criticism these lines received over the course of two decades).

criticism and have been viewed as examples of poor poetry, it is because they are spoken by a narrator towards whom Wordsworth intended his readers to be harshly critical. Indeed, they manifest the inauthentic care and the limitations of the kind of “credulous and talkative” men, “prone to superstition,” that this narrator represents, as Wordsworth puts it in his note to “The Thorn” (*Lyrical* 37). I explain below why the way the narrator cares is commonplace, reductive, unproductive, circular, limited and limiting, and why I agree with Sheats’s claim that “the unpleasant effects of ‘Tis three feet long’ are indeed deliberate movements in a larger strategy of confrontation” (93).

My agreement with Sheats has to do with the fact that “the narrator is not only the central figure but, in a sense, the subject of the poem” as Stephen Maxfield Parrish puts it in “‘The Thorn’: Wordsworth’s Dramatic Monologue.” The poem “was intended to be a psychological study, a poem about the way the mind works. The mind whose workings are revealed is that of the narrator, and the poem is, in effect, a dramatic monologue,” Parrish continues” (154). He explains in a footnote that what he means by this, is that “The Thorn” is “loosely, a poem in which the events related are meaningful not in themselves but as they reveal the character of the person who relates them” (154n2). “The Thorn” thus is not a poem about a thorn, but about the narrator’s way of being, including his relationship and behaviour towards the thorn and Martha. The narrator’s way of being or caring is betrayed by his use of language and his descriptions and accounts of the things and events he talks about. Therefore, what the narrator says, such as the way he describes the size of the pond, is a statement that tells us—and that is meant to tell us—more about the narrator himself, about his behaviours, thought-processes, interpretations and understandings of things, than about the pond. Parrish expresses surprise at the fact that “[o]f the dozen of critics who have commented on ‘The Thorn,’ hardly one appears to have discerned who the central character is and what the poem is about” (153); likewise, he adds: “That Wordsworth’s design should have been lost sight of seems astonishing, for he took unusual pains to make it clear” (154). The “unusual pains” Parrish refers to are the prefatory “Advertisement” (1798) and the later (1800 and onwards) “Note to The Thorn,” however, in the 1815 and 1820 collections of his poems, Wordsworth did not choose to include a note to “The Thorn.” Moreover, unlike in those later collections, none of the 1798 to 1805 editions of *Lyrical Ballads* have quotation marks at the beginning of “The Thorn,” so in *Lyrical Ballads*, the poem itself does not immediately invite the reader to consider the narrator as a character. Thus, as Sheats points out, “it is not until stanza eight that the



unexplained appearance of a second voice implies the dramatic character of the first" (93). Before then, including because of the lack of quotation marks, nothing invites readers to distance themselves from, or to question the stance of, the narrator. There is even a risk of conflating author and narrator, hence Wordsworth's 1798 warning, in the "Advertisement," that "[t]he poem of the Thorn, as the reader will soon discover, is not supposed to be spoken in the author's own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently show itself in the course of the story" (*Lyrical* 35).<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, at the start of the poem and up to stanza eight, readers may believe they are listening to a speaker addressing them, or that they are witnessing an inner monologue. This intimacy is created as the speaker confides his impressions and hesitations regarding the bushy thorn, particularly through the use of the pronoun "you" in statements such as "In truth you'd find it hard to say," (1.2) or "So close, you'd say that they were bent" (2.18). This intimate relationship with the speaker, which lasts for the first seven stanzas, is suddenly challenged in stanza eight with the appearance of the second voice. Readers may realise only then that another listener is, and was, also being addressed, and that the poem is a dialogue between two characters—as Sheats was quoted pointing out (93). Even readers who interpret the poem as being an interior monologue realise at this stage that the inner voice's thoughts may be interrupted by this second inner voice and its questioning. This confusing effect of that second voice, as well as the possibility that it should be internal, is discussed by Susan J. Wolfson in "Speaker as Questioner in *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798," where she writes about this second voice that

[i]ts echoing locution, as well as the anonymity of its identity and origin, suggests that it may even be expressing half of an internal dialogue between a self who reaches after fact and reason and a self burdened with a mystery. Indeed, in subsequent editions of the poem, Wordsworth puts quotation marks around both voices . . . blurring even further the distinction between the two (34).

Wolfson's idea of a character who "reaches after fact and reason" all the while being "burdened with a mystery" brings further support to the notion of a narrator torn between scepticism and animism, which I discuss further on.<sup>61</sup> Regardless of whether one reads the

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<sup>60</sup> Wordsworth's 1815 decision to add quotation marks that immediately frame the narrator's speech as that of a character might partly explain why Wordsworth thought he no longer needed to provide a note to the poem.

<sup>61</sup> Wolfson's reading of Wordsworth's 1815 edition of "The Thorn" (and of later editions)—whereby there is only a single, hesitating, self-questioning voice—suggests that the narrator, in those later editions, comes across as muddled up in conflicting thoughts, and paralysed by uncertainty, in an even more compelling way than in *Lyrical Ballads*. Indeed, in the latter—be it in the 1798, the 1800,

second speaker as a voice internal to the narrator or not, its appearance and questioning, framed by quotation marks, introduces disruption and a distancing from the first speaker. What had been a linear, uninterrupted, and intimate conversation or interior monologue involving the first speaker and the listener or reader, is replaced by a triangular relationship that opens up the possibility for additional questions or interruptions. This late appearance of the second voice therefore disrupts and problematizes any identification between reader and speaker, or between speaker and poet. I say this partly because Sheats points out that “[i]n the volume of 1798 the reader came to ‘The Thorn’ from ‘Lines Written in Early Spring,’ the speaker of which, a humanitarian philosopher, is in no way differentiated from the poet. Many readers seem to have made a similar assumption about the conventions governing ‘The Thorn’” (93).<sup>62</sup> The identification or conflation that is possible in stanzas one to seven is put into the spotlight, challenged and questioned when the second voice appears; readers seeking identification or conflation might for instance wonder whether the poet sides with this second voice instead, or whether, as readers, they identify more with this second voice’s questioning stance. My point is that the poem has readers go from intimate sympathy and uncritical acceptance of the narrator’s stance and speech—which readers may identify with or conflate with their own, or with that of the poet—before introducing a critical distance and an awareness of this twofold process—both the identification or conflation and the critical distancing that follows. Through this distancing, the poem makes it possible for readers to become aware and to question not only the narrator’s stance and speech—how he cares—but also their own stances or relationships towards him, how they, as readers, care—how they perceive the narrator, how critically or uncritically they understand him and identify with him. The poem enables this not only through the introduction of the second voice’s questions, but it sustains it throughout the poem by making the relationship between the two voices problematic. By problematic I mean, on the one hand, that the second voice repeatedly questions the first one and tries to make sense of what it is suggesting; it thus repeatedly asks: “Oh wherefore? wherefore?”

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the 1802, or the 1805 edition—the narrator’s speech is never framed by quotation marks. As a result, their appearance in stanzas eight, ten, and twenty to frame the questions about the narrator’s story provide more of a visual break and a clearer distinction between moments of interrogation and moments of narration—even if one understands that second voice to be internal to the narrator, rather than coming from a second character.

<sup>62</sup> As was pointed out previously, the 1798 “Advertisement” *does* warn the reader not to make such an assumption, but because this text is at the beginning of the collection, and because it also discusses other poems, Sheats probably assumes those “[m]any readers” have forgotten—or have failed to read—that text before reaching “The Thorn.”

tell me why" (8.87). On the other hand, this relationship is also problematic insofar as the two speakers fail to communicate successfully: not only does the narrator fail to provide definitive answers to the second speaker's questions, the latter fails to understand that they will not get the answers they are hoping for and they continue to ask questions of this kind in stanza ten and again in stanza twenty.

By focusing on the narrator—on his way of speaking, on what he is interested in and on his behaviour—the poem therefore does not deliver a ballad about a mother who murdered her child, even though "[t]he commonest of all literary associations for a thorn tree were illegitimate birth and child murder," as Mary Jacobus points out in *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (241), and even though "the circumstances of 'The Thorn' virtually duplicate those of the popular 'Lass of Fair Wone'," Sheats points out (97). The narrator's inability to deliver facts about Martha and her child is what frustrates the poem's second speaker and why he repeatedly urges the narrator for explanations; because the first speaker is not an omniscient narrator, he "cannot tell" (9.89) what really happened to Martha Ray and why she behaves the way she does. As W.J.B. Owen writes in his article "'The Thorn' and the Poet's Intention," "we do not here have to do with the conventional omniscient narrator; on the contrary, the narrator is constantly confessing his ignorance or uncertainty, or reliance on hearsay" (4). This, along with the narrator's "continual reversion to, or obsession with, the objects of his story" (Owen 4) means that, as Sheats puts it, "the intrinsic interest of his lurid tale is frustrated by narrative incompetence and inappropriate responses" (97) and what is left is "a narrative vacancy: instead of incidents, the speaker offers possibilities" (Sheats 97). The fact that "the narrator tells the story of Martha Ray rather badly" (Owen 4), both explains the mixed reception the poem has received and why Geoffrey H. Hartman calls it, in *Wordsworth's Poetry*, "one of the strangest poems in *Lyrical Ballads*" (146) and "Wordsworth's most experimental poem" (141). The unusual nature of this poem—presenting a speaker frustrating another through the former's inability to be a good storyteller—is nevertheless consistent with statements Wordsworth makes in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, where he condemns "deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" and "a degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" which he says he has "endeavoured to counteract" (*Prose*, 1:128-30). Such thirst is brought to the reader's attention through its similarities to "The Lass of Fair Wone"—and the expectations such similarities raise—but also through the second speaker's recurrent demand for more information regarding Martha's story. Sheats points

this out when he writes both that “the art of ‘The Thorn’ presumes that Martha’s story will awaken a stock response, that ‘craving for extraordinary incident’ that the Preface identifies” (97) and that “[s]uch hunger for ‘gross and violent stimulants,’ as the Preface describes it (*Pr* 128), is modelled by the mysterious questioner who appears three times to demand access to Martha’s story” (97). The poem therefore invites its readers to be critical of the poem’s two speakers and to question their own expectations and cravings (as readers) as frustration at not being able to know or to be told what happened to Martha accumulates—particularly in the second speaker who expresses this frustration by repeating similar questions several times (8.78-88, 10.100-4, and 20.210-14).

The poem’s refusal to provide factual information, together with Martha’s cry being the poem’s concluding words, is therefore a means for Wordsworth to purify and strengthen our affections and enlighten our understanding, as he states in his “Preface” (*Prose*, 1:127). In this respect as well, “The Thorn” stands in contrast to “The Lass of Fair Wone,” as Sheats notes, given that in the latter “a pathetic episode—the betrayal of the heroine—fills eleven stanzas of richly detailed dialogue” (99). Wordsworth sought, on the contrary, to write “without the application of gross and violent stimulants,” as he puts it in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (*Prose*, 1:128). The result, according to Sheats, is a poem where human suffering and sorrow are expressed without pathos and heavy-handed stirring up of pity: “Martha’s landscape and the fixed words of her cry function as an icon of human suffering, but our contemplation of that icon is purged of pity as well as melodramatic sensation. The complementary negations cancel such other, [sic, each other] leaving a transfigured image of that most ordinary phenomenon, human sorrow” (99)<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Other Wordsworth scholars, such as Frederick Garber, are critical of what Wordsworth does with the character of Martha Ray in this poem ; in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter*, Garber writes: “Martha Ray turns out to be nothing much more than a figure less interesting in herself than in her ability to stir compassion in the reader, which might have happened in some cases” (105). Such criticism provides further arguments to critics who argue that Wordsworth often *uses* characters—in particular destitute ones who suffer—for the benefits of the feelings that they awaken in some other character, the speaker, the reader, or society as a whole. “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” for instance, contains a utilitarian praise of the benefit there is in letting beggars stimulate the sympathy of others. In other words, and as Jerome J. McGann puts it in *The Romantic Ideology*, “Wordsworth’s poetry elides history,” (91) as well as the socio-economic factors that result to people being left to struggle in lonely misery, preferring instead to dwell on the effect of the experience of that misery, which is a “displacement of the problem inwardly” (91), into consciousness. That being said, “The Thorn” strikes me as more interesting than other poems about miserable women, including, say, “Ruth” or “The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman,” because whereas in the former the omniscient narrator claims to know what Ruth feels, and whereas in the latter the poet presumes to be able to speak for the Indian woman in the first person (*as this*

What matters is not factual knowledge of circumstances in order to either pity or condemn someone, but how one *cares*, i.e., how one responds to another person's simple and ordinary expression of suffering. According to such a view, critics such as Francis Jeffrey who lamented the absence of "tenderness" in "The Thorn," as Sheats points out (98), fail to realise that this is purposeful: it reflects the two speakers' cold and obsessive focus on getting a knowledge of facts, their inability to be respond to Martha's suffering and to disregard the facts that brought it about—or rather, their inability to disregard rumours.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Sheats' argument that both the poem and sceptical epistemology suggest that "all that can be known" is "not Martha's cry [as such] but the speaker's experience of that cry" (98) is a point that further stresses that the subject-matter and focal point of the poem is the narrator's reaction to that cry, his behaviour and what goes on in his mind as a result of that experience. This is what the poem draws the reader's critical attention towards—according to this reading of the poem—as opposed to it awakening pity for Martha.

The repetition of Martha's cry together with the narrator's inability to provide facts about her actions and situation therefore also illustrates another statement Wordsworth makes in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: "I should mention one other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling" (*Prose*, 1:128). Wordsworth argues that the way one feels is worth acknowledging and paying attention to—and that one can empathise with (i.e. feel sympathy for) someone—regardless of the factual circumstances or evidence of the actions that surround and account for those feelings.<sup>65</sup> Martha's cry is thus repeated throughout

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person), "The Thorn" refrains from such presumptions. Moreover, unlike in those two other poems—and unlike in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" where there is no critical distance towards the narrator's relationship to the beggar—in "The Thorn" Wordsworth brings into critical focus the narrator's response to a woman's suffering and makes it problematic—thereby opening up the possibility for a questioning of the reasons for her situation and for a lack of solicitous action (on the narrator's behalf and on that of others).

<sup>64</sup> If readers end up lamenting the poem's lack of "tenderness" because they feel there is a lack of reasons, of factual information that would explain Martha's suffering and awaken pity, then the poem has failed to put its readers at a critical distance from its narrator, which is what the note says it intends to do—a note whose presence suggests that the mechanisms within the poem that are meant to create this critical distance may be too subtle or not immediately evident.

<sup>65</sup> My interpretation of Wordsworth's statement is further supported by the fact that his words are followed by the following sentence: "My meaning will be rendered perfectly intelligible by referring my Reader to the Poems entitled POOR SUZAN and the CHILDLESS FATHER, particularly to the last Stanza of the latter Poem" (*Prose*, 1:128). Indeed, the last stanza of "The Childless Father" describes an otherwise unimportant and ordinary action—the eponymous character of the poem locking his

"The Thorn" like a call prodding the narrator's sympathy—a call the latter does not respond to—reminding the narrator that beyond all the facts he can gather about the place of the thorn and beyond his own speculations and the rumours he has heard, there remains this resonating expression of suffering. The poem ends with this reminder, so that this expression of suffering is what the two speakers—and the reader—are finally left with, not factual knowledge about events. Sheats thus points out that "we cannot 'know' the cause, the 'why' and 'wherefore' so insistently demanded by the questioner and denied by the speaker" (98); as in the aforementioned passages of Hume's epistemological work (*Treatise* 268), we—and the characters of the poem—are left without any certainties and with an inability to know. All that ultimately remains and matters is this expression of Martha's feelings that the narrator knows he have heard—and it seems to haunt him precisely because he does not act upon it. Martha's emotional lament, the feelings conveyed by that cry, is what "gives importance to the action and situation," as Wordsworth writes—both the action and situation of Martha being left sitting on a mountainside on her own, and the narrator's lack of solicitous reaction and his vain, paralysing fixation on the unknowable details surrounding the child and pond. In other words, it is Martha's suffering, as conveyed in her cry, that makes the situations and actions—both hers and the narrator's—important and problematic.

This analysis raises the question of the reasons for the narrator's response to his experience, to Martha's cry. Indeed, the lack of "tenderness" in the poem does not only stem from a lack of pathos and pity, but also from the narrator's failure to do anything about Martha's suffering, from the absence of any solicitude. What, then characterises the narrator's way of caring? Hartman, who also argues that the poem's narrative brings into focus the narrator's way of thinking, writes:

The slow and teasing narrative Wordsworth gives his "loquacious narrator" exposes a mind shying from, yet drawn to, a compulsive centre of interest. . . . [T]here is a reluctance to come to the point. Yet his repetitiousness soon infers an intent of its own, and we suspect that his mind cannot free itself from some *idée fixe*. As he warms up to his tale he fluctuates more obviously between disclaiming firm knowledge and thirsting for it. . . . (147-8)

Hartman's terms "*idée fixe*" and "cannot free himself" underscore the epistemological entrapment, rigidity, or paralysis of the narrator, while his terms "fluctuates" and "shying

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front door—but it poignantly describes what this father might think and feel, even though he says nothing and only has "a tear on his cheek" (*Lyrical* 307). That sign of emotion (the tear) is noticed by the narrator and acknowledged as probably indicative of strong, meaningful, and important feelings.

from, yet drawn to” indicate that this fixity is concomitant with an oscillation or a hesitation between, on the one hand, the temptation to yield to the theories conveyed by hearsay, and, on the other hand, the desire to resist their pull and to attempt to uncover truth using reason. Hartman moreover argues in this passage that the narrator is “thirsting” for knowledge in a “compulsive” fashion conveyed by “his repetitiousness,”—such as his reiteration of Martha’s cry. Neil Fraistat likewise links repetition with obsession; in *The Poem and the Book*, he writes that “repetition, another characteristic of the traditional ballad, is also used often in *Lyrical Ballads* to depict obsession” (77). The main obsessive behaviour that the repetitions in “The Thorn” draw attention to, is an obsession with knowledge, a stubborn quest for certainty and explanations, and this obsessive behaviour is fuelled both by uncertainty and by hearsay—such as the mysterious account of how the hill stirred (22.236-9). As Fraistat observes, “It is therefore unsurprising that ‘The Thorn,’ the poem in the volume that deals most directly with mystery, is the poem most filled with the questions of its narrator and the obsessions of its characters” (77-8). That a problematic relationship to knowledge, characterised by obsessive repetition, should be central to “The Thorn,” is all the more worth stressing that this poem constitutes “a centrepiece” for *Lyrical Ballads* (51), particularly as it is “[p]laced twelfth of twenty-three poems” (78), as Fraistat points out. “The Thorn”’s representativeness becomes even more apparent if one considers, as does Peter de Bolla in “What is a Lyrical Ballad? Wordsworth’s Experimental Epistemologies,” that “a number of poems in *Lyrical Ballads* explore questions of knowing” (51). De Bolla then highlights how “The Thorn” explores such questions, and problematic relationship to knowledge, through the “repetition in ‘I tell you everything I know’ (l. 105) and ‘I’ll tell you all I know’” (51).

The narrator’s repetitive focus on knowledge, on what he can or cannot tell, his “continual reversion to, or obsession with, the objects of his story: the thorn, the pond, the heap of moss, Martha Ray and her cry of misery, and the mountain,” as Owen notes (4), all speak of an inability to be moved, including emotionally, out of an unsuccessful and paralysing stance bent on attempting a rational, objective, and detached understanding of both Martha and the place of the thorn. In other words, the repetitions emphasise the paucity of the narrator’s stance and the fact that it does not lead him anywhere, all the while highlighting the ways in which he conflates and treats in a similar way Martha, a suffering human being, and the place of the thorn. Indeed, the narrator does not feel the need to talk to Martha: hearing her cry from afar and seeing her face is “enough” for him

(19.200), as if a person's situation, suffering, and past actions could be understood from a distant or detached and objective point of view—such as through the telescope the narrator carries with him. His objectifying gaze goes as far as mistaking Martha for a “jutting crag,” while, conversely, his attempts at an objective and detached description of the place of the thorn are riddled with anthropomorphic qualifiers and result in an animistic temptation to believe that it moved. The narrator's failure to care authentically, to behave solicitously towards Martha—or even to speak to her—become more apparent as his repetitive behaviour and statements accumulate. It is indeed the accumulation itself that conveys meaning, as Mary Jacobus argues: “‘The Thorn’ enacts the narrator's own fascination with Martha's dimly perceived tragedy, drawing on the processes of communication to mirror those of the imagination. Just as Martha's refrain-like cry becomes cumulatively expressive, so the narrator's garrulousness ends by communicating the incommunicable . . .” (249-50). Whereas Jacobus considers that “the narrator's garrulousness” partakes in conveying the incommunicable nature of suffering (Martha's), I contend that it communicates above all how the narrator cares, how he is trapped in—and blind to—his way of caring, how he fails to care authentically. The narrator's way of speaking therefore both conveys how he has a responsibility, through his inaction, in the ongoing, repetitive nature of Martha's crying and suffering, and it communicates the narrator's own ethically problematic and painful—or rather, uncomfortable—position of paralysis and unsolicitous inaction.

Moreover, “repetition and apparent tautology” are discussed by Wordsworth in his note to “The Thorn” in a paragraph that begins with a request for “permission to add a few words closely connected with ‘The Thorn’ and many other Poems in these volumes” (*Lyrical* 38). This indicates that repetition, in “The Thorn,” is a means for Wordsworth to draw the reader's attention to a problematic way of being—manifested in the poem through its narrator—that is important to Wordsworth because it is linked to “many other Poems” and because he devotes a long paragraph to a discussion of repetition. In this paragraph, Wordsworth states that “an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers or the deficiencies of language. During such efforts there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character” (*Lyrical* 38). However, Wordsworth also adds that when a word is perceived to successfully communicate feeling, one enjoys repeating it: “the mind



luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings" (*Lyrical* 38). Does the narrator in "The Thorn" then repeat words because of an "unsatisfied" "craving in the mind" that leads him to "cling to the same words" because he is frustrated at "the deficiencies of language" to "communicate impassioned feelings," or does he "luxuriate in the repetition of words" because he feels they "successfully communicate" the way he feels? I think that his repeating of Martha's cry is a sign of both: this cry seems to him to "successfully communicate" her presumed remorse and indicate her guilt, yet the narrator remains "unsatisfied" with it because he is "craving" for a clearer expression of the "impassioned feelings" of which the cry is a sign. Such mixed feelings further explain why the narrator remains paralysed, oscillating between a sceptical and a superstitious stance, unable to choose between these or to move beyond this limited and limiting way of caring.

Indeed, this mixed relationship—of craving for more, all the while relishing the little there is—pervades the narrator's speech in the same way that he combines and hesitates between an attempt to rigorously keep to facts and indulging in superstitious interpretations. As Jerome Christensen writes in "Wordsworth's Misery, Coleridge's Woe: Reading 'The Thorn'," "[t]he 'craving' Wordsworth mentions is evident in the first five stanzas of the poem, where the narrator attempts to describe the spot that so fascinates him. He begins with the statement 'There is a thorn'—a stark, matter of fact declaration, but in 'The Thorn,' as we learn, matters of fact are also matters for desire" (276). "As the predicate develops, however, the world of fact begins to dissolve into shadows of imagination," Wolfson adds (33). The narrator for instance precisely describes and objectively measures the size of the place of the thorn all the while adding that it has human traits and that the heap is the size of a grave. As Arnd Bohm puts it in "An Allusion to Tasso in 'The Thorn'," "the narrator in 'The Thorn' is figured as a rational investigator who is trying to solve the mystery of Martha Ray, but his attempt to impose rational order on the world [is] filled with superstition" (78). The narrator thus both relishes and feels stuck in scrutinising the place of the thorn in this pseudo-scientific way, and his repetitions point towards the fact that he both wallows in this stance all the while feeling torn and paralysed because of it, repeatedly stating what he knows, what he does not know, and what he heard Martha cry out. Readers who initially sympathise with the narrator gradually distance themselves from him—through the introduction of the speaker's questions and the accumulation of the narrator's repetitions—in order to grow increasingly aware that

Martha, whose repeated lament concludes the poem, is ultimately ignored and not being cared for. The poem, through its “loquacious” and “superstitious” narrator, who repeats himself and turns away—“I turned about” (19.201)—without even saying a word—“I did not speak” (19.199)—from a woman in distress whom he objectifies, therefore manifests an inauthentic form of care all the while hinting, in the negative, at what a more solicitous and authentic caring way of being might imply.

### 3.2 Analytical Reading

Having drawn on secondary criticism all the while putting forward the claim that “The Thorn” manifests care, this investigation now calls for a closer reading of the poem in order to uncover precisely—and to further discuss—how the poem conveys how the narrator cares. The poem starts with a line that attempts to make a clear distinction between what *is* and how that something *appears*: “There is a Thorn – it looks so old” (1.1). This distinction between ontology and phenomenology is an *attempt* insofar as although a dash marks a clear visual break and separation, it is not a complete one, and it also implies a connection and continuity.<sup>66</sup> This first line, in this respect, is symptomatic of how the narrator repeatedly tries to distinguish with certainty between what he can and cannot ascertain, or claim to know as definitely true. It also reveals how he tends to shift from objective statements towards subjective impressions. The fact that the narrator is drawn towards the latter is highlighted when he repeats “It looks so old” three lines later (1.4). The narrator thus comes across as obsessed with this place, these distinctions, and his own inability to reach a firm and definitive truth. His repetitive stressing of the limits of the knowledge he has, of what he (or others) can ascertain, is apparent in “I cannot tell; I wish I could; / For the true reason no one knows” (9.89-90), “I’ll tell you every thing I know” (10.105), “I’ll tell you all I know” (11.114), “No more I know, I wish I did, / And I would tell it all to you” (15.155-56), “There’s none that ever knew” (15.158), “There’s no one that could ever tell” (15.160), “There’s no one knows, as I have said” (15.162), “I cannot tell” (20.214) and “I cannot tell how this may be” (23.243).

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<sup>66</sup> The dash first appears in the 1802 edition; it replaces the semicolon of the 1798 and 1800 editions, and is retained in the later collections of Wordsworth’s poems (1815 and 1820). Each time it is an em dash, which is longer than the en dash Mason uses in his edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. That Wordsworth should have initially put in a semicolon has no incidence on my argument since the interruptive-yet-connecting effect of the dash is also conveyed by a semicolon.

The narrator's obsession with knowledge together with his insistence on how things look, appear, or seem to be, betrays a way of being characterised by two distinct but connected ways. During the first six stanzas, he attempts to adopt a detached, scientific stance by providing detailed physical descriptions of this place, complete with both instructions on how to find its location, and precise measurements:

Not five yards from the mountain-path,  
This Thorn you on your left espy;  
And to the left, three yards beyond,  
You see a little muddy Pond  
Of water, never dry;  
I've measured it from side to side:  
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide. (3.27-33)

These objective measurements, however, are framed or surrounded—in the stanzas that precede and follow them—by subjective impressions, judgements, and comparisons. For instance, two lines state that the heap by the thorn is “like an infant's grave in size,” (5.52 and 6.61). Similarly, the statement that the thorn by the heap is “like a stone” (1.10) is repeated two lines later—“Like rock or stone” (2.12). These comparisons, the fact that they should be repeated and that they frame or surround the objective description, suggest that the narrator cannot help seeing the thorn like a gravestone and the entire place like a burial site, in spite of all his efforts to be as detached and objective as possible.

Consistent with this—and with the fact that the first line, as previously mentioned, starts with an objective description (“There is a Thorn”) before making a subjective judgement (“it looks so old”) which is repeated three lines later—the second half of the poem gives way to vague opinions and hearsay, after a first half largely devoted to attempts at being detached, objective, and descriptive. As from stanza twelve, the poem is thus riddled with lines conveying what other people say: “they say” (12.129 and 13.133), “some say” (20.216 and 21.225), “’Tis said” (13.137) “Old Farmer Simpson did maintain” (14.149), “I’ve heard many swear” (16.173) “some will say” (20.214), “I’ve heard” (21.221) and “But all do still aver” (22.240). What such falling back on—or temptation to fall back on—hearsay and on other people's opinions indicates, is the danger or pitfall of a response to scepticism that would entail following imaginative superstitions and popular beliefs. Frustrated by the limitations of objective scientific knowledge, superstition and hearsay indeed become tempting alternatives to rational reasoning. Once the limits of reason have been established—that is to say, once the narrator has done his objective measurements

and once he has realised that there is very little that he can claim to know and that he will not reach a definitive truth by following this rational approach—following irrational intuitions or feelings and imaginative superstitions appears as a potential means of accessing that ungraspable truth. In oscillating between the paucity of objective, detached, scientific measurements, such as the yards and feet of stanza three, and rich, subjective and imaginative ones, such as “an infant’s grave in size” (5.52), which are based on rumours, the poem conveys the impression of someone trapped by sceptical demands for reaching a comprehensive and firm certainty—an impression further conveyed by the repetitions of questions and of what cannot be affirmed.

By choosing a character who is both superstitious and a sceptic, a character torn between a scientific, objective approach and a superstitious one that gives into what hearsay and his imagination would have him believe, Wordsworth’s poem makes apparent the pitfalls of both approaches. They both fail to realise the wealth of meanings that could arise from an acknowledgement of, and a careful attentiveness to, ordinary relationships to things—relationships that the narrator shies away from. What I mean by this, and by the narrator’s shying away, is perceptible when the narrator first meets Martha on his way to a hilltop to watch the ocean—a passage I quote in full so as to draw attention to the precise unfolding of events and in order to make my subsequent analysis easier to follow:

For one day with my telescope,  
To view the ocean wide and bright,  
When to this country first I came,  
Ere I had heard of Martha’s name,  
I climbed the mountain’s height:  
A storm came on, and I could see  
No object higher than my knee.

XVIII

’Twas mist and rain, and storm and rain,  
No screen, no fence could I discover,  
And then the wind! in faith, it was  
A wind full ten times over.  
I looked around, I thought I saw  
A jutting crag, and off I ran,  
Head-foremost, through the driving rain,  
The shelter of the crag to gain,  
And, as I am a man,  
Instead of jutting crag, I found  
A woman seated on the ground.

XIX

I did not speak – I saw her face,  
Her face it was enough for me;

I turned about and heard her cry,  
"O misery! O misery!"  
And there she sits, until the moon  
Through half the clear blue sky will go, (17.181-19.204)

The narrator turns away from Martha without a word, even though she is a woman sitting on her own, on an exposed mountainside, in a misty and windy rainstorm. The narrator's walking away from a human being right next to him, in other words, his dismissal of the alive and proximate, and of an unmediated subject-to-subject relationship, goes hand in hand with his desire to look at what is faraway ("the ocean wide") in a mediated, detached fashion—through a "telescope," a scientific instrument which, in being placed between subject and object, brings the latter artificially close all the while keeping it out of reach. Even after having been forced by the elements to look not at the ocean but, instead, at what is near, at his feet ("I could see / No object higher than my knee") the narrator turns away from Martha as if she remained the "jutting crag" he thought she was. Moreover, this occurred before the narrator even heard of the gruesome and supernatural rumours about Martha ("When to this country first I came, / Ere I had heard of Martha's name,"), so his behaviour is not due to these—even though his interlocutor and the reader have a perception of Martha that is coloured by those rumours since the narrator conveys these prior to describing his encounter with her. This reversal of—or contrast between—the chronology of events and the order of his narration is a further indication of the narrator's objectifying obsession with the thorn and fascination with hearsay theories since his narration puts both of these forward before mentioning his encounter with a human being in difficulty. This objectification and lack of consideration is also conveyed by the narrator's decision to refer to Martha only as "A Woman" (6.63) at first, and to delay the disclosure of her name for approximately fifty lines, at which point her name is mentioned parenthetically: "she (her name is Martha)" (11.116). Subject-to-object relationships with inhuman and dead things—the place of the thorn and its hypothetically dead baby—are therefore given priority and are of more interest to the narrator than both a subject-to-subject relationship (the encounter) and a human being in obvious need of help—with whom no ordinary relationship, not even a conversation, is attempted.

Before further discussing the above passage, why and how the narrator turns away from Martha, and the meaning of "Her face it was enough for me;" (19.200), it is useful to note that the narrator's aforementioned de-animating gaze—favouring a subject-to-object stance that focuses on comprehending a specific place and its hypothetical corpse, rather

than on the distressed woman who goes to that place—is concomitant with a superstitious and animistic stance, complete with pathetic fallacy:

Some say, if to the Pond you go,  
And fix on it a steady view,  
The shadow of a babe you trace,  
A baby and a baby's face,  
And that it looks at you;  
Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain  
The baby looks at you again.

XXII

And some had sworn an oath that she  
Should be to public justice brought;  
And for the little infant's bones  
With spades they would have sought.  
But then the beauteous Hill of moss  
Before their eyes began to stir;  
And for full fifty yards around,  
The grass it shook upon the ground; (21.225-22.239)

These lines, taken from the penultimate and antepenultimate stanzas of the poem, further convey the narrator's aforementioned temptation to fall back on irrational intuitions from the imagination, hearsay, and beliefs. The distinction between what "some say" and what the narrator believes and affirms to the reader, is blurred. The semicolon at the end of "And that it looks at you;" suggests both a continuity and a break from the account of what "some say," and it is possible, as a result, that the narrator should be the one saying that "'tis plain [that] / The baby looks at you again." Additionally, in the following stanza, the narrator no longer tells the reader what others have said, but narrates, instead, events that seem to have happened—"some had sworn an oath . . . // And for the little infant's bones / With spades they would have sought"—so that the stirring of the hill of moss and the shaking of the grass "[b]efore their eyes" is not questioned but simply stated as a matter of fact. Such an animating of the world corresponds to an exploration of the mental places which ordinarily superstitious people are naturally led towards when they follow their feelings and their imagination—as Wordsworth himself announces in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*<sup>67</sup> and in his note<sup>68</sup> to "The Thorn."

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<sup>67</sup> "Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plain and emphatic language" (*Lyrical* 236)

<sup>68</sup> "It was my wish in this poem to show the manner in which such men cleave to the same ideas; and to follow the turns of passion, always different, yet not palpably different, by which their conversation is swayed" (*Lyrical* 277).

Although still trapped in his scepticism and superstitious animism, the narrator takes a step back in the final stanza—which starts with “I cannot tell how this may be,” (23.243)—and reverts to a simple description of the place before concluding by repeating Martha’s cry—““Oh misery! oh misery! / ‘O woe is me! oh misery!’” (23.252-3). Although reverting to that cry indicates that the narrator and his narration are stuck in a loop, it also suggests that Martha ultimately has the last word—and literally, she does. That is to say, I think that the ending shows the way out of the trap the narrator is still caught in; it suggests a way of avoiding the pitfalls of scepticism and superstitious animism. Indeed, Martha’s cry points towards that which the narrator has failed to do, which is to *let go* of those alternatives of scepticism and animism. These are not so much alternatives as two sides of a same coin or mind-set; letting-go of them, the poem suggests, would open up the possibility of having a subject-to-subject relationship towards Martha, of listening to her, in other words, of manifest authentic care, including towards the wealth of meaning—and suffering—that *her* words, her account of her own story, harbour. Martha’s cries out “Oh misery!” when the Captain turns away from her, as if to call him back or to draw to herself the subject-to-subject attention she is denied. The reiteration of that cry throughout the poem (6.65-6, 7.76-7, 19.202, 19.209, 23.252-3) suggests it is like a call waiting to be answered, and its recurrence suggests that it haunts the narrator precisely because he has not answered that call. Like the narrator, the villagers seem to *hear* Martha—“As all the country know, / She shudders, and you hear her cry” (19.207-8)—but nobody seems to *listen* to her: readers, like the narrator before them, are told a story about her, but Martha is not given the opportunity to tell *her* story.

Paying careful attention to and listening to someone’s story is thus both what the poem gets the reader to do as far as the narrator is concerned—the reader’s careful attention is even tested from the outset with the narrator’s six-stanza-long description of the place of the thorn—and it is what the poem gets the reader to witness the Captain failing to do regarding Martha, by walking away from her and not speaking to her. In this respect, the poem manifests both care and a lack thereof. It suggests that the proper alternative to the morbid objectification and detachment of the sceptical and scientific mind-set is not an animistic and superstitious following of customary beliefs and of the imagination’s intuitions, rather, it is a letting-go, a freedom from these that gives life—and care—back to the otherwise objectified and neglected (in this case, Martha). This way of being substitutes attempts to clutch or grasp something perceived as foreign or remote,

with reception, welcoming, subject-to-subject relationships where quests for truth and undeniable knowledge are replaced with trusting acceptance and listening.<sup>69</sup>

The narrator therefore displays a form of care that Heidegger calls concern in *Being and Time*—as discussed in Chapter One of this investigation—but he does not display any solicitude towards Martha. The narrator's task-focused concern is perceptible not only when he provides precise measurements of the place of the thorn in yards and feet, but also in his intention to scrutinise the ocean from a hilltop through his telescope—an instrument which is the product of precise, rational measurements. This intention to use a telescope indicates an interest in things remote and extraordinary, and in contemplating them from a distance, as opposed to looking, in a more ordinary way, at things that are close and that pertain to the ordinary. Indeed, the narrator does not simply go to the shore; the hill and the telescope both mediate and separate him from the sea. This focus on the far, as opposed to the near, is perceptible in two other behaviours of his. The first a refusal to lower himself and pay close attention to Martha. She is low insofar as he is standing and she is "seated on the ground" (18.198), and she is close to him insofar as he explains that he walked right up to her because he mistook her for a crag—due to the fact that "I could see / No object higher than my knee" (17.186-7). The second behaviour is the narrator's fascination for what is extraordinary about the place of the thorn. That is to say, the narrator is not interested in the ordinariness of the thorn, mossy heap and pond, instead he deliberately focuses on what is peculiar about them, for instance, on how unusually old and stone-like the thorn looks—features the narrator mentions twice, as pointed out earlier. In other words, though he may have been physically close to this place, the narrator's perspective on it puts it at a remove, in the realm of the mysterious, the fascinating

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<sup>69</sup> Cavell's following words apply to "The Thorn," although they are about a different poem by Wordsworth: "Wordsworth's construction is to replace the ordinary in the light in which we live it, with its shades of the prison-house closing upon us young, and its custom lying upon us deep almost as life, a world of death to which we are dead—replace it accordingly with freedom ('heaven-born freedom'); and with lively origination, or say birth; with interest" (*In Quest* 75). Cavell here refers to being dead to the world that ordinarily surrounds us because of custom, but "The Thorn" is also a poem about being trapped—to use Cavell's above words—in "the prison-house" of "custom," which, in this case, would refer to both the sceptical and animistic mind-set the narrator has become accustomed to, and to the customary superstitions he relates and fall prey to. That is to say, although the narrator in "The Thorn" is not "dead" to the world around him since he does have an "interest" in the place of the thorn, his interest is not free from the "prison-house" of his own death-dealing or death-ascribing tendencies.



unknown. He sees something eerie, uncanny or *Unheimlich* about it. His behaviour is characterised by both a scientific approach, including when measuring the place, and by an animistic one, since, for example, he is tempted to say about the mosses that they *intend* to drag the thorn down: “you’d say that they were bent / With plain and manifest intent / To drag it to the ground” (2.17-20).

The narrator’s relationship to the place of the thorn, his behaviour towards Martha, and his interest in the open ocean are related insofar as they are failures to encounter the low and proximate in their ordinariness and to be receptive to the latter. Emerson’s following maritime metaphor from “Experience” about how we retreat from the ordinary therefore applies to “The Thorn”’s narrator: “Every ship is a romantic object, except that we sail in. Embark, and the romance quits our vessel and hangs on every other sail in the horizon. Our life looks trivial, and we shun to record it. Men seem to have learned of the horizon the art of perpetual retreating and reference” (*Essays* 472). The narrator—“a captain of a small trading vessel,” Wordsworth suggests in his note to the poem (*Lyrical* 37)—retreats from Martha to keep her at a distance, so that she should be, and remain, like the place of the thorn, in the realm of the extraordinary and unknown—which is more interesting and more emotionally exciting than the realm of the ordinary. Indeed, it is only because of the rumours about Martha and because of his encounter with her that the narrator decides to scrutinise the place of the thorn; in other words, only after it is perceived as extraordinary. Moreover, he scrutinises the place of the thorn—as opposed to attempting to talk to Martha—because this distance is affectively or emotionally safer.

Indeed, subject-to-object relationships of detachment, of towering over objects of scrutiny, are emotionally safer than subject-to-subject relationships of proximity, listening, and careful attention, which entails the risk of being affected or moved. A telescope likewise brings the remote and extraordinary artificially close so that it may be even more exciting and fascinating all the while remaining at a distance; its mediated closeness is not the proximity of an actual encounter. I therefore interpret the narrator’s retreat, or turning away from Martha, as motivated by a refusal of, or a retreat from, feelings that might move the narrator, or emotions that might shift him from his affectively detached position of a subject scrutinising objects. To support this argument, it is necessary to discuss the following lines from the previously quoted stanza relating the Captain’s encounter with Martha: “I did not speak—I saw her face, / Her face it was enough for me;” (19.199-200).

The caesura (the dash), the repetition (of “her face”), the emphatic structure (the double subject “her face it”), and the lack of explanation—on behalf of someone who is able to spend sixty lines describing in great detail a thorn and its surroundings—all contribute to convey the impression that the narrator was affected by the sight of Martha’s face. In his edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Michael Mason argues in a footnote about “it was enough for me” that “[t]his can be read as a record of the narrator’s rejection of Martha’s suffering or, more plausibly, of his instantaneous conviction that she is to be pitied” (*Lyrical* 125n). It matters little, for the point I wish to make, *how* one understands the narrator to have been affected—whether touched, moved, shocked, taken aback, or repulsed. What I wish to point out, is that the narrator felt something, and that he immediately repealed and turned away from whatever it is that he felt—to the point of not even paying attention to, and not saying, what it is that he felt. Whether it be rejection or pity, as Mason suggests, it is not sympathy nor compassion, that is to say, not a feeling *with* Martha.

Hume’s ideas also support my argument that, having been brought unexpectedly near Martha, the Captain is affected by her: “there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us . . .” (*Treatise* 481). Immediately repressing his feelings, the narrator fails to realise that letting himself be affected or moved by Martha—by trusting the spontaneous, natural, and ordinary feelings brought about by this proximity and its stirring of sympathy—would shift his relationship towards her from that of a subject towering over an object and intent on pursuing detached, rational comprehension, to that of a subject being-with and feeling-with another subject—which would then open up the possibility for the narrator to manifest authentic, respectful, heartfelt, and solicitous care towards her. How we feel is indeed what determines our morality according to Hume, as pointed out earlier in this Chapter: “morality is determined by sentiment,” he writes in “Appendix 1” to his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (85). Rational thinking, or reason, is a tool, a logical mechanism that establishes connections, but it is not the engine of moral action: “reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will,” he also writes (*Treatise* 413). It is the passions, rather, that are the engine of action, including of moral action, while reason comes as an (*a posteriori*) provider of logical links and coherence: “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (*Treatise* 415). On this account, turning away and barring himself from the possibility of feeling empathy for Martha not only bars the Captain from being

moved to act morally, but such a turning away is also determined, i.e. triggered, by the feeling that the sight of Martha began to stir in him. That is to say, just as the Captain is unaware that his apparently rational and thorough description of the place of the thorn (in the first six stanzas) is in fact laden with imaginative associations, irrational judgements, and pathetic fallacies, so too does he not realise that his turning away from Martha is, in fact, triggered by a dislike of the realisation that sentiments were suddenly being awakened in him and starting to *move* him, including away from his preferred stance of flawed rational detachment. In other words, the events and narration in “The Thorn” suggests, like Hume did in his philosophical works, that the passions—as well as the imagination and custom, if one bears in mind the first six stanzas of the poem—plays a strong role in both our understanding and our moral actions. Moreover, Wordsworth’s poem, like Hume’s works, does not call for a turning away from rational thinking that would embrace and trust the passions, the imagination, and custom; indeed, “The Thorn” warns against this pitfall too, as was pointed out earlier. Rather, what is at stake is an acknowledgement, a recognition of how we ordinarily, fundamentally, phenomenologically are-in-the-world, of how we act and react, and such a recognition constitutes nothing short of a solicitous giving one back one’s capacity and potential—and of one’s *awareness* of one’s capacity and potential—to care authentically.

Lastly, the narrator’s repression of his feelings, of any feeling *with* Martha, i.e., of a possible affective proximity of identification with her, stands in contrast with both Emerson and Heidegger’s descriptions of the poet as displaying an attentive care that is affective and emotional (heartfelt), and with their ideas of either striving for a union of subject and object, or of forsaking and going beyond this distinction. As the *authoritative*, story-telling voice of the poem, the narrator therefore fails<sup>70</sup> poetically as well, since he falls into the category of poets Emerson criticises in the following sentence from his essay “The Poet”: “Even the poets are contented with a civil and conformed manner of living, and to write

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<sup>70</sup> Failure, Simon Critchley argues in *Things Merely Are*, is also characteristic of post-Romantic poetry, such as Wallace Stevens’s: “Stevens’s poetry fails. Maybe all modern poetry fails. And maybe this is the point. In my view, poetry written in the wake of Romanticism is defined by an experience of hubris and failure, of hubris presaging failure” (87). Another overlap between Critchley’s description of Stevens’s poetry and my reading of Wordsworth’s “The Thorn” is perceptible in another passage where he argues that “it is plausible to read Stevens’s entire poetic production in terms of an oscillation between two poles and two aesthetic temptations: on the one hand, the imagination seizing hold of reality, and on the other, reality resisting the imagination” (*Things* 63). I further discuss Critchley’s ideas, and their relation to the notion that poetry manifests care, in Chapter Four.

poems from the fancy, *at a safe distance* from their own experience” (*Essays* 447, emphasis added). The Captain “conformed” to the villagers’ superstitious way of thinking, indulging in fanciful theories, remains at a distance both from Martha and from what he started feeling when he met her, i.e., his “own experience.” The narrator’s behaviour also stands in sharp contrast with what Wordsworth writes of the poet in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*: “it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs” (*Prose*, 1:138). The relationship and feelings Wordsworth describes entail paying close attention and authentically caring by letting the person speak and by allowing their behaviours to ordinarily manifest themselves. The poet does this as far as the narrator is concerned, but the narrator does not do this with Martha. That is to say, the poem itself is not a third person account, from an external point of view, of what the character of the narrator did or said. However, an external, third person account of Martha—of her experience and life, as it is thought to have been—is what the reader gets from the narrator. In this respect, care both is and is not at the centre of “The Thorn.”

#### 4. Closing Remarks

My reading of “The Thorn” has argued that it is a poem about the ways in which the narrator cares, and, more specifically, about manifestations of inauthentic care. The fact that, in his prefatory note to the poem, Wordsworth asks his readers to be critical of his narrator’s stance supports this reading, but my analysis has shown that several mechanisms within the poem bring to the fore how the narrator cares—both towards the place of the thorn and towards Martha—and that these allow and invite readers to adopt such a critical stance. In this respect, I tread in the footsteps of David Simpson who, in *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern*, argues: “Poems like ‘The Thorn,’ ‘We Are Seven,’ and even the ‘Tintern Abbey’ poem all call into radical question the competence of speakers and narrators” (31). My analysis of “The Thorn” contends that this “call into radical question” is also a call, in the negative, for authentic care, insofar as it provides “an anatomy of how hard it can be to take that step”—an expression I borrow, again, from Simpson: “[no] bond is established between strangers that models or presages the initiation of a social contract. Instead, the poem presents an anatomy of how hard it can be to take that step. Lots of Wordsworth’s best poems send this message – think of ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ or ‘Old Man Travelling’ or ‘Simon Lee’” (25-6). I do not claim, however,

that Wordsworth's ability to write poetry putting forward the shortcomings of its narrator, as is the case in "The Thorn," means that he, as a poet, does not adopt equally questionable stances. Wordsworth has indeed been criticised for the political complacency or hollowness behind his declared interest in the ordinary: summarising the views of some of his detractors, Michael Fischer for instance writes that "[i]n his egotism, Wordsworth doesn't see rustics as they are but as how he wants them to be" (556). Whether this is true of several or even most of Wordsworth's poems is not up to this investigation to determine, but what this study has demonstrated is that, as far as "The Thorn" is concerned, such "egotism" and inability to see people "as they are but as how he wants them to be" is displayed not by the poem's author, but by its narrator—a character Wordsworth expects his readers to be critical of, as he is in his note to the poem.

Another point that lies beyond the scope of this investigation into some of the origins of Emerson and Heidegger's ideas about poetry and care, is the question of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's influence, and of the extent to which some those origins can be traced back to him. I mention Coleridge since he is the co-author of *Lyrical Ballads*—he collaborated with Wordsworth for its 1798 edition, which was published anonymously, and he wrote a few of the poems in this collection. Emerson met both Wordsworth and Coleridge when he travelled to England, and Stanley Cavell, whose work I discuss in Chapter Four, writes about both Wordsworth and Coleridge when discussing Romanticism in *In Quest of the Ordinary*. Moreover, Coleridge's prose works, such as *Biographia Literaria*, contains a discussion of poetry, including of *Lyrical Ballads*, and of German idealist philosophy, such as Immanuel Kant's. Contrary to what these characteristics may appear to suggest, however, both what Coleridge writes about poetry and *Lyrical Ballads*, and his interest in, admiration for, and indebtedness to German idealism and metaphysics, do not bring him closer than Wordsworth to the ideas this investigation explores. Indeed, Heidegger's works are critical of and respond to idealism and metaphysics, such as Kant's, which his works attempts to do away with. Mining the works of a British writer drawn towards views Heidegger criticises is therefore unlikely to yield ideas that have affinities with the latter's. I do not claim that Wordsworth's views are closer to Heidegger's than to Coleridge's, or that he criticises German idealism and metaphysics—in fact, like Emerson and through Coleridge, he too is influenced by it—but Wordsworth's works, like Emerson's, have a more ordinary and proto-phenomenological focus than Coleridge's. That is to say the idea of paying close attention to—of poetically caring for—ordinary things, people, and

behaviours, which is present in Emerson's works (as discussed in Chapter Two of this investigation), is an idea that primarily belongs to Wordsworth. Coleridge explains this himself in *Biographia Literaria*, where he acknowledges that *Lyrical Ballads* is mainly Wordsworth's production:

it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic. . . . Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day. . . . But Mr. Wordsworth's industry had proved so much more successful, and the number of his poems so much greater, that my compositions, instead of forming a balance, appeared rather an interpolation of heterogeneous matter. (6)

What Coleridge means by the "things of every day" that were the focus of Wordsworth's work, is that "subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such; as will be found in every village and its vicinity" (5). "The Thorn" has such a focus: in his note to the poem, Wordsworth describes its main character, the narrator, as "sufficiently common" (*Lyrical* 37), including because of his interest in ordinary village hearsay and superstitions. However, even though the poem is about "things of every day" insofar it begins with the description of a simple thorn, pond, and mossy heap, it does more than simply give them "the charm of novelty." The fact that the narrator of the poem relates these ordinary things to hearsay about uncanny events does cast new light on them, but Wordsworth's poem questions that new light as well as the temptation to see these ordinary things as *extraordinary*. It also allows for an interrogation about what and who is overlooked and left behind by such a stance and by such desires for novel, remote, or extraordinary things. Lastly, Coleridge was critical of several aspects of Wordsworth's work, including of his longer "Preface" to the later editions of *Lyrical Ballads*, so studying the former author's work would have had to include a discussion of his disagreements with the latter. Engaging with Coleridge's work, for all these reasons, would have taken this investigation further away from its aim to demonstrate the relevance that the notion that poetry manifests care has for poetics and for the history of ideas.

Just as my reading of Emerson in Chapter Two pointed out that his works contain claims about poetry that pertain to a Heideggerian kind of phenomenology, so too has this chapter investigated the proto-phenomenology within Wordsworth's views on poetry and on the poet's relationship to things ordinary. Studying several of his prose works has revealed an emphasis on paying close attention to the human experience, to how one perceives and interacts with things, and has disclosed how they constitute a pledge and a

call for poets to manifest and foster an acknowledgement of how we care. In tracing some of the origins of the notion that poetry manifests care back to Wordsworth's works, I have also shown how the philosophical nature of the latter's claims—about poetry, the human experience, our relationships with things, and the connections between all of these—stems from an engagement with British empiricism, and more specifically with the legacies of Hume's epistemology, scepticism, and theory of moral sentiments. A more thorough exploration of the philosophical influences on Wordsworth's works would have revealed the prominent roles played by other philosophers, and may even have shown, for instance, that his views on sympathy are philosophically closer to those put forward by Adam Smith—who was also influenced by, and who responded to Hume's ideas.<sup>71</sup> However, because Hume's works put forward ideas pertaining to both epistemological scepticism and moral sentimentalism, bringing Hume's views into my analysis of Wordsworth's ideas has allowed me, and has proved sufficient, to demonstrate that Wordsworth's prose and poetry incorporates and responds to philosophical ideas about the role and the limits of both reason and the passions in our understanding and our moral actions. There are two additional reasons that explain why I have discussed some of the relationships between Hume's ideas and Wordsworth's works, and these have to do with my work in Chapter Four. Indeed, analysing how some of the origins of the idea that poetry manifests care lie in Wordsworth's engagement with Hume's ideas, notably his scepticism, first enables me, in the next chapter, to better engage with Stanley Cavell's claim that "romanticism generally is to be understood as in struggle with skepticism" (*In Quest* 175). Second, Chapter Four's discussion of the legacies of the notion that poetry manifests care also briefly draws on ideas put forward by care ethicists such as Joan Tronto, who devotes part of her book *Moral Boundaries* to Hume's views, upholding that "the ethic of care will have some resemblances to Scottish thought" (58). In other words, Chapter Three's study of Wordsworth's ideas in relation to Hume's has exposed some of the philosophical connections and roots common to care-ethics, Cavell's ideas, and the notion that poetry manifests care, which Chapter Four will now discuss.

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<sup>71</sup> Robin Grey's chapter "Enlightenment and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy" in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* contains a more comprehensive discussion of such points.

## Chapter Four: Cavell

In *In Quest of the Ordinary*, Stanley Cavell writes:

The direct historical connection (of Emerson with Heidegger) is through Nietzsche, but the intellectual conjunction has been a touchstone for me in the past few years in exploring the idea that romanticism generally is to be understood as in struggle with skepticism, and at the same time in struggle with philosophy's responses to skepticism. (How generally this applies is not yet important. It is indicated by the figures of Coleridge and Wordsworth behind Emerson and Thoreau, and by Hölderlin's shadow in Heidegger.) (175)

In the previous chapter, this investigation of the idea that poetry manifests care studied some of the origins of the “intellectual conjunction” Cavell mentions above by looking at both prose and poetry by Wordsworth. Cavell argues that the “intellectual conjunction,” or overlap, of Emerson and Heidegger's ideas is a “touchstone” for him in understanding Romanticism's “struggle” with scepticism and “philosophy's responses” to it.<sup>72</sup> My reading of some of Wordsworth's prose works and of his poem “The Thorn” both highlighted the influence, thereon, of the epistemological scepticism of David Hume, and revealed the ways in which these texts by Wordsworth anticipate—or contain the premises of—some of Emerson and Heidegger's ideas on poetry. I have thereby sought to underscore the philosophical legacies, responses, and continuities between these authors' ideas, particularly on the topic of poetry. Moreover, in doing so, this investigation has also paved the way for an exploration of what Cavell makes of these connections, and how they constitute a “touchstone” for him. In other words, having studied some of the origins of Emerson and Heidegger's ideas on poetry, this investigation will now study some of their legacies. What this will amount to is an exploration of the relevance of the idea that poetry manifests care for contemporary—especially Cavellian and post-Cavellian—literary theory and criticism. Two questions will therefore drive this chapter's discussion of Cavell's ideas, each being the flip side of the other. First, is the idea that poetry manifests care helpful in order to understand, to provide further insights into, and to disclose further implications of what Cavell argues regarding the similarities and philosophical connections he finds between scepticism, Wordsworth (and how he understands Romanticism), Emerson, and Heidegger? Secondly, conversely, and simultaneously, can Cavell's ideas on these points

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<sup>72</sup> I have chosen to capitalise ‘Romanticism’ and ‘Romantic’ throughout this study, even though Cavell does not, both so as to distinguish the latter adjective from the one relating to love, and so as to be consistent with my decision to capitalise ‘Being’ in Chapter One.



help further discuss and get a better understanding of the implications of the idea that poetry manifests care and what the latter can bring to literary theory and criticism? I start to address these questions by investigating Cavell's notion that Romanticism struggles with, and responds to, scepticism, highlighting the influence of the ideas of Emerson and Heidegger therein, and I end with a discussion of the ethical dimension of these ideas.

## **1. Scepticism or the Ordinary: Domestication and Accommodation**

Cavell's works, especially *In Quest of the Ordinary*, contain both discussions of some of Emerson and Heidegger's views, and, as mentioned above, the claim that romanticism responds to scepticism. Moreover, in the opening pages of the aforementioned book, he writes: "I see both developments—ordinary language philosophy and American transcendentalism—as responses to skepticism" (4). It is beyond the scope of this study to examine precisely what Cavell contends regarding ordinary language philosophy, but the second half of this sentence—Cavell's idea that American transcendentalism constitutes a response to scepticism—is a claim I discuss because it pertains to Emerson's ideas. Indeed, in the sentence before this one, Cavell writes about "Emerson and Thoreau in their devotion to the thing they call the common, the familiar, the near, the low" (4), so when he uses the term "American transcendentalism" in the next sentence, he is primarily referring to these two authors.<sup>73</sup> I will come back to Cavell's point about "the common, the familiar, the near, the low" later on; at this stage I simply wish to point out that, according to Cavell, Emerson's work can also partly be understood as a literary response to philosophical scepticism. Why does Cavell make this claim, what does he mean by scepticism, by a response to it, and could it be that Emerson's ideas *about poetry* are constitutive of a response to scepticism? So as to better tackle these questions, it is worth pointing out that Cavell establishes a direct link between romanticism and Emerson a couple of pages later when, still writing about Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, he writes about "the claim that the transcendentalism established in their pages is what became of romanticism in America" (6). What Cavell means by "romanticism" he explains on that same page as follows:

What I mean by romantic is meant to find its evidence—beyond the writing of Emerson and Thoreau—in the texts of Wordsworth and Coleridge that I explicitly consider. If what I say

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<sup>73</sup> Cavell later calls Thoreau Emerson's "disciple" (*In Quest* 160), implying that the master(mind) is Emerson, and that the ideas of the latter writer are the ones he primarily has in mind—even if only as the origin or inspiration for other transcendentalist ideas—when using the term "transcendentalism."

about romanticism is false to these texts, then for my purposes here it is false to romanticism, period. If what I say is true but confined to just the texts I consider, I shall be surprised but not abashed; I know very well that there is in any case work ahead of me. (6)

What this passage makes clear is that just as Cavell primarily refers to Emerson and Thoreau when using the term “American transcendentalism,” so too is his use of the term “romanticism” mostly synecdochical and a way of referring to the works and ideas of another pair of authors, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Within *In Quest of the Ordinary* thus lies an investigation of the continuity and links that exist between Emerson’s work and Wordsworth and Coleridge’s ideas, notably as they are expressed in *Lyrical Ballads*, which Cavell mentions a few sentences above this passage.

Moreover, just as Cavell writes about Emerson’s work being a response to scepticism, he writes about “reading texts of Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, as though they are responding to the same problems philosophers have, even responding in something like the same way” (*In Quest* 7). In other words, according to Cavell, philosophers put forward “problems” to which Emerson, Wordsworth and Coleridge are all “responding” in some of their works. Not only do transcendentalism and Romanticism—insofar as Emerson and Wordsworth represent these literary movements—respond to philosophical problems, according to Cavell, they also respond in “the same way” philosophers do.<sup>74</sup> What Cavell means by this, and what, according to him, is constitutive of both movements’ responses to scepticism, is their common “emphasis on the common, the near, and the low” (*In Quest* 6), that is to say, their shared interest in the ordinary. Before I discuss what this means and how an emphasis on the ordinary can pertain to a response to scepticism, I wish to point out—about the links between Romanticism and philosophy—that in the chapter entitled “Texts of Recovery” (of *In Quest of the Ordinary*) which explores literary (Romantic) and philosophical responses to scepticism, Cavell discusses Heidegger’s ideas as well, in particular those expressed in the German philosopher’s essay “The Thing.” I point this out to highlight the fact that Cavell not only directly links his ideas about Romanticism and scepticism to Emerson’s transcendentalism, but also to Heidegger’s philosophical works; indeed, about the latter, Cavell asks: “Is this a philosophy of romanticism?” (*In Quest* 66). Cavell thereby suggests that Heidegger’s works might contain

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<sup>74</sup> Cavell here also has ordinary language philosophers in mind, especially J. L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein, but I am leaving out the parallels he draws between these and transcendentalism-*cum*-romanticism in order to focus solely on the links between the latter two movements (Emerson and Wordsworth in particular).

a theorisation—an attempt to put into philosophical language—of the ideas expressed by Wordsworth and Coleridge—since, as was pointed out earlier, the latter stand for Romanticism in *In Quest for the Ordinary*. This investigation therefore needs to lay out and explain Cavell's arguments about how and why Emerson and Romanticism's interest in the ordinary constitutes a continued response to philosophical scepticism all the while highlighting how Heidegger's ideas—particularly those pertaining to care and poetry—are also a continuation and a theorisation of this Romantic response.

As was pointed out earlier in this investigation, Emerson and Heidegger both present poetry as offering a stance or relationship to the world which is the opposite of the detachment, abstraction and objectification which, according to them, are characteristic of scientific materialism. Does this view of poetry then pertain to—and constitute a continuation and a theorisation of—what Cavell calls Romanticism's response to scepticism? In order to answer this question, this investigation must clarify the ways in which Cavell understands Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge to be responding to philosophical scepticism. What Cavell calls Emerson and Thoreau's "emphasis on the common, the near, and the low" (*In Quest* 6) is related to and has its origins, according to Cavell, in "Wordsworth's notorious dedication of his poetic powers, in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, to '[making] the incidents of common life interesting,' and his choosing for that purpose 'low and rustic life'" (*In Quest* 6). Cavell's words about Emerson's "emphasis on the common, the near, and the low" are an explicit reference to the latter's following words from "The American Scholar": "I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low" (*Essays* 68-9). This investigation has already discussed these words, arguing that Emerson's call for an attentiveness to what is ordinary and proximate pertains to the kind of authentic care that Heidegger also calls for. That this call should have an antecedent is acknowledged by Emerson, since earlier in the same paragraph of "The American Scholar" he writes, in a sentence referring to the French Revolution:

the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. (*Essays* 68)

In this passage which links politics and literature, Emerson argues that there is a historical continuity between, on the one hand, his own nineteenth-century call for an embrace of

the ordinary (such as “the meaning of household life,” which is one of “the topics of the time”) and, on the other hand, an eighteenth-century political and artistic “movement.” The outcomes of the latter, Emerson writes, were both the French Revolution (“the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state”) and the fact that “the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized.” The term “movement” suggests a change, a response, and even though Emerson does not use the term ‘Romanticism’ above, at the beginning of the paragraph that follows the one containing the lines above, he mentions authors pertaining to Romanticism. Indeed, he writes about Wordsworth—as well as Robert Burns, William Cowper, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—as one of the writers “inspired” (*Essays* 69) by the idea that ordinary things harbour a wealth of meaning.

To be more specific, Emerson’s considerations are those of an idealist insofar as close attention to what is near and ordinary reveals, he argues, that in these particulars are undisclosed, unseen and unacknowledged universals: “let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law” (*Essays* 69). It is more precisely *this* idea that “inspired” Wordsworth and the aforementioned poets, according to Emerson. He further puts this idea as follows: “Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. This perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful in discoveries” (*Essays* 69). What such sentences make clear is that even though Emerson calls for a bottom-up approach, focusing on the near and vulgar, rather than on the distant and ethereal, his views still pertain to idealism. In other words, although he argues that it is not remote—certainly not European—ideas, people, or things that will speak for—including politically—and reveal the meaning of what lies here, nearby, locally in Concord Massachusetts, Emerson believes close attention to the proximate and ordinary will disclose that the latter is fundamentally akin to what is remote and extraordinary. This close attentiveness to the proximate and ordinary which Emerson calls for, and which this investigation has argued pertains to authentic care, is a legacy of empiricism, especially insofar as Emerson’s above call pertains to a bottom-up deductive approach, as opposed to inductive, top-down and abstract or detached reasoning. Cavell also points out connections between Emerson and empiricist philosophers such as David Hume and George Berkeley (the latter being an empiricist idealist) when, commenting about the above passage from “The American Scholar,” he writes:

By “embracing the common,” by “sitting at the feet of the low,” Emerson surely takes his stand on the side of what philosophers such as Berkeley and Hume would have called the vulgar. Unlike a certain line of thinkers from Plato through Nietzsche to Heidegger, for whom real thinking requires spiritual aristocracy, those English writers will not depart from and disdain the life of the vulgar altogether. It is internal to their philosophical ambitions to reconcile their philosophical discoveries with the views of the vulgar. . . . (*In Quest* 147)

In *In Quest of the Ordinary*, Cavell thus underscores the philosophical connections between sceptical philosophers such as Hume, Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, and American transcendentalists such as Emerson. What they all have in common, he argues, is an interest in “the common, the near, the low,” which they do not want to “depart from and disdain”; on the contrary, they all claim that there are meaningful insights to be gained—into how we relate to the world—from paying close attention to ordinary things, ordinary people, and how the latter relate to the former. Cavell dissociates Heidegger from these thinkers in the passage above, arguing that the German philosopher believes instead in a form of “spiritual aristocracy.” Indeed, the German philosopher is critical of the carelessness of everyday relationships to things—all the while praising the converse, *careful* relationship of tarrying with things which characterises the poet. Nevertheless, in *Being and Time*, and as discussed in Chapter One, Heidegger acknowledges how *a priori* meaning-laden and interpretative even the most immediate and ordinary relationships to things are. Moreover, even though the poet’s stance is not an ordinary or vulgar one according to Heidegger, it remains an attentive dwelling alongside ordinary, everyday things (such as a jug or a bridge). That is to say, for Heidegger too, ordinary things and our relationships with them—even ordinary ones—harbour a wealth of meaning that tends to go unacknowledged, even by philosophers. Careful attentiveness to things and to our relationships with them, particularly ordinary ones, therefore connects Hume, Wordsworth, Emerson and Heidegger; Cavell’s arguments are useful in making these connections apparent as they discuss the views these authors hold about the ordinary. What still remains unclear, however, is what this connection between these writers has to do with Cavell’s idea that the latter three—Romanticism, American transcendentalism, and Heidegger’s “philosophy of romanticism” (*In Quest* 66)—constitute responses to scepticism.

So as to better understand and further explain this link between, on the one hand, an interest in the ordinary as well as “the views of the vulgar” and, on the other hand, scepticism as a problem which, according to Cavell, Romanticism addresses, it is worth returning to the previously quoted opening pages of *In Quest of the Ordinary*, where Cavell calls American transcendentalism a response to scepticism. He adds that Emerson and

Thoreau's ideas are "responses to skepticism, to that anxiety about our human capacities as knowers that can be taken to open modern philosophy in Descartes, interpreted by that philosophy as our subjection to doubt" (*In Quest* 4). Scepticism is, Cavell explains in this passage, an "anxiety about our human capacities as knowers," which means that scepticism asks whether knowledge is something we can ever claim to have. In other words, scepticism asks: how can you be sure that you *really know*? Cavell's way of wording this, in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (more specifically, in the chapter entitled "What is the Scandal of Skepticism?") is: "in Descartes's *Meditations*, the philosopher reflects, or confesses, in effect, 'I have always claimed to know all sorts of things, to have true beliefs about the objects in the world and about myself and others in it, but what can I be said really to know, what is my so-called knowledge based upon?'" (142). This way of thinking thus turns ordinary understandings of things into problems of knowledge. Moreover, Cavell's term "anxiety" implies that this questioning brings with it an unpleasant—even unhealthy—feeling of uncertainty or doubt. The main reason for this feeling of "anxiety," Cavell argues, is that scepticism's questioning is experienced as a "dispossession," as he puts it in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (61). That is to say, scepticism deprives one from any sense of certainty that one's knowledge is correct and reliable; it conveys the idea that one may have been deceived into considering as knowledge something which is not worthy of this term. I will come back to Cavell's use of the terms "dispossession" and "loss of ground" (*Conditions* 61) shortly.

With this distinction—which is a gap, insofar as it can be thought of as the creation of a discrepancy, the opening of an intellectual space—scepticism moreover brings to the fore the distinction between, on the one hand, the subject or self, as perceiving and thinking consciousness, and, on the other hand, the world, as an object. Scepticism thus considers the world as a distinct cognitive entity or object, even if it is deemed to be a hallucination, or to be ultimately unknowable (Immanuel Kant calls the true-but-unknowable object the thing-in-itself) and it questions our knowledge of it, the truth, or the degree of certainty, of what we can say about it. Scepticism moreover turns our experience and understanding of the world into knowledge-claims and it questions their validity: it transforms ordinary relationships to things into problems and pursuits of certainty, into degrees of ability and desires to ascertain, attain, reach, grasp, or possess knowledge. In suggesting that we may not *comprehend* the world, in saying that we may not have, grasp, or possess a true understanding or knowledge of objects (whether particular things or the

world as a whole), scepticism creates a relationship of more or less firm grasping, of *comprehension*, of possession. In *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Stephen Mulhall thus writes about the modern sceptic philosopher: "The world disappoints him precisely because he interprets his goal of achieving and maintaining certainty about the world's existence as a matter of achieving and maintaining an undispossessable possession of that world—a literally fantastic, necessarily unattainable ideal" (151).

Scepticism's stance towards the world and our relationships with it stands in sharp contrast with the one we ordinarily have. Questions of truth or certainty are not part of our ordinary experiences or understandings of the world; we do not ordinarily ask ourselves whether we comprehend with certainty, whether we have a firm grasp of the things and people we experience and interact with. What scepticism does, therefore, is create an anxiety-inducing situation of loss of property, of dispossession in lieu of ordinary acceptance or acknowledgments of experiences and understandings. Cavell puts such arguments forward in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, particularly in the part entitled "Aversive Thinking." In it, he calls scepticism "the withdrawal of the world" and Emerson's response to it a "domestication":

Emerson's perception of the dispossession of our humanity, the loss of ground, the loss of nature as our security, or property, is thought in modern philosophy as the problem of skepticism. The overcoming or overtaking of skepticism must constitute a revolution that is a domestication for philosophy (or redomestication) because, let us say, neither science nor religion nor morality has overcome it. On the contrary they as much as anything cause skepticism, the withdrawal of the world. . . . Domestication in Emerson is the issue, or urgency, of the *day*, today, one among others, an achievement of the everyday, the ordinary, now, here, again, never again. (*Conditions* 61)

Cavell's point is that scepticism makes us think that we do not have a firm comprehension of things, and that we consequently tend to want to get a firmer grasp of what is reliably true, as Descartes does. However, the remedy to this dispossession, to this feeling of not being on firm ground, is not a search for possession, for firmer ground, such as through science, since scepticism always withdraws any firm ground, including to the unreachable noumenal realm.<sup>75</sup> Cavell explains that what Emerson calls for instead ("domestication"), is a feeling-at-home-with our ordinary relationships with the world, a welcoming acceptance that attentively cares for the wealth of meanings these relationships harbour, as opposed

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<sup>75</sup> Heidegger, notably in "What Are Poets For?," also writes about loss of ground (*Abgrund*) and how poets are the ones who accept it and "reach into the abyss" (*Poetry* 91).

to perceiving them as something deceitful to be constantly suspicious of, something for us to doubt.

At first, it may seem that Emerson hopes for, and calls for, a realisation or revelation—notably through poetry—that our ordinary relationships to things contain that certainty, that ultimate and objective truth about the world that the sceptic is so hungry for. However, I do not think that Emerson or Heidegger call for a poetic transfiguration of ordinary things whereby a comprehensive *knowledge* of those things would finally be *grasped* once and for all, because a hope for that kind of mystic revelation perpetuates a relationship of knowledge that is constitutive of scepticism. Instead, I understand both Emerson and Heidegger to argue that instead of being overlooked or disdained, ordinary things should be acknowledged, respected, and related to with authentic care in order for us to become receptive to the wealth of meanings that they (and our relationships to these) harbour, without any quest for objective and comprehensive knowledge. Cavell also understands Emerson to be calling for this, even though he does not understand Heidegger quite in the same way.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, if, according to Cavell, “[d]omestication in Emerson is . . . an achievement of the everyday, the ordinary” and an “overcoming or overtaking of skepticism,” it is because a carefully attentive acknowledgement of the ordinary constitutes a receptive welcoming—that is to say, a feeling-at-home-with or an acceptance as part of one’s being-in-the-world—of precisely that which a sceptical mind questions and does not trust, which is our ordinary understandings of and relationships to things, people, and the world. It is “a revolution” insofar as where scepticism dismisses or turns away from these because it considers them untrustworthy, unable to provide reassuring definitive truths, this relationship to the ordinary *turns back* towards and opens the door to these ordinary understandings and relationships to things—hence, also, the idea of welcoming back into

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<sup>76</sup> Cavell writes: “I am pleased to find Emerson and his transfigurations of the ordinary to stand back of Wittgenstein and Heidegger” (*Conditions* 61). He thus sees Emerson’s views on the ordinary as “between these visions of both Wittgenstein and of Heidegger” (*Conditions* 61). Such sentences, along with his reading of Heidegger’s “The Thing” in *In Quest of the Ordinary*, suggests that on a continuum that goes from Romanticism—with its interests in the ordinary, as expressed in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—through to Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP), Emerson is closer to Wittgenstein and OLP than Heidegger—whose essay “The Thing” almost constitutes a “philosophy of romanticism” according to Cavell (*In Quest* 66). Such differences—the order of the stepping stones that Cavell sees (or places) between Romanticism and OLP—are of little importance to this investigation. What I wish to register and investigate here is the fact that, according to Cavell, Emerson and Heidegger are present on this continuum that runs from Romanticism to OLP as I explore the pertinence of the concept of care therein.



one's home, which "re-domestication" conveys.<sup>77</sup> I contend that poetry, according to both Emerson and Heidegger, *cares* for these relationships, by listening to them and allowing them to unpack or unfold the wealth of meanings they harbour; poetry neither overlooks and ignores them, nor does it pry into and dissect them the way a sceptical scientific mind might.

The metaphorical language I have used here, by referring to ordinary understandings and relationships to things as guests unpacking and being listened to after being welcomed into a home,<sup>78</sup> is deliberate. I have used it for several connected reasons. This language, like that of "domestication" which Cavell uses, deliberately forestalls, or overcomes or overtakes, to use Cavell's terms, a no-less metaphorical language and relationship of attainment and possession, of reaching for and grasping. As was pointed out earlier, this language conveys a relationship that a subject has to a physical object, whereas a language of "domestication," in its etymological sense of bringing into one's home, like 'reception,' conveys a more affective and welcoming relationship of acceptance towards another being. This alternative way of understanding relationships to things, as closer to that of a subject towards another subject than that of a subject towards an object, pertains to Heidegger's understanding of solicitude and authentic care, as it is respectful of ontological and interpretative wealth, whereas the alternative objectifying relationship, characteristic of scientific scepticism, is not. To further discuss and clarify this notion of "domestication," and why Emerson calls for it as a way of responding to scepticism, I briefly turn to Cavell's *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*. In the chapter entitled "What is the Scandal of Skepticism?," he writes about *accommodation* as an alternative to sceptical stances when facing, for instance, a situation of misunderstanding, or when one's assumptions about what is meant are challenged. He explains this by taking the example of an unusual behaviour, such as that of someone who, having invited us to tea, starts using a toy teapot and cup and pretends to pour. It is possible, in such a situation, to behave

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<sup>77</sup> There is also a political aspect to this "revolution" (and "domestication") which I briefly discuss later, towards the end of this chapter.

<sup>78</sup> Earlier in "Aversive Thinking," when Cavell writes about how "Emerson's image of clutching and Heidegger's of grasping, emblemize their interpretation of Western conceptualizing as a kind of sublimized violence," he adds that "[t]he overcoming of this conceptualizing will require the achievement of a form of knowledge both Emerson and Heidegger call reception" (*Conditions* 39). Although Cavell only points out how the passivity of "reception" is opposed to the activity of "clutching" or "grasping," I find it telling that "reception" should also be a term that used to refer to the subject-to-subject relationship of welcoming guests at one's home.

differently than by demanding an explanation and by requiring of the person that they explain their actions in a rational way. One can, Cavell explains, play along, and do as if this was an ordinary behaviour: “I might *accommodate* myself to this person . . . I join my ordinary to his” (*Philosophy* 137). When one does *not* accommodate, when one demands to know, or *comprehend*, the meaning of a behaviour, action, or word, then one is behaving like a sceptic, which is why Cavell writes of “scepticism as the case in which accommodation is not possible” (*Philosophy* 138). Although, etymologically, to accommodate means to fit together (hence his “I join my ordinary to his”) this word also means to have someone stay at one’s home; in other words, accommodation is akin to *domestication* insofar as both words may mean bringing into one’s home, feeling-at-home with, making room for another and sharing a common, ordinary, dwelling place.

Conscious acts of accommodation are not always possible or necessary, Cavell adds; most of the time we accept and make-do with what are, strictly speaking, ambiguities. Cavell thus discusses the canonical example of how, when we say that we “see the table,” what we mean and contend is ordinarily clear, even though it may be argued that, in fact, we only see parts of certain surfaces of the table (*Philosophy* 139). This capacity to communicate with ambiguity, which we constantly ordinarily display without even being aware of it, like our capacity to accommodate to ambiguity when it is brought more strikingly to our attention—as in the case of the toy teapot—is manifested, most of the time, in and through language. Cavell thus writes: “on the whole we do not *have* to accommodate ourselves to one another in speaking—we *are* accommodated, attuned I have said” (*Philosophy* 139). This, Cavell adds, “can seem a mystery” and it “sometimes gives us the feeling that the fact of language is like a miracle. Poets cultivate the feeling” (*Philosophy* 139). Cavell’s short sentence about poets suggests that the latter are aware both of the ways in which we ordinarily do not need to accommodate, and of the ways in which language—seemingly miraculously, or seamlessly—enables us to communicate with the kind of ambiguities that scepticism questions and tries to eliminate. Moreover, the idea that poets should “cultivate” this feeling of mystery or awe at how we communicate in and with language suggests that poems, both their writing and their reading, are what brings one’s attention to this capacity and what fosters one’s awareness of it.

In paying attention to the ordinary—which is what Emerson urges poets to do—poetry may thus draw attention to the interpretative gaps or ambiguities that the ordinary

harbours, so as to point out the wealth of meanings contained therein. It may also draw the reader's attention to the extent to which our ordinary relationship to meaning and to experience is one of *trust* rather than one of sceptical doubts and demands for clarity and certainty. Indeed, we ordinarily trust both ourselves and others, including what is meant by what one says or does, as with the sentence 'I see the table.' Cavell explains this in the following passage:

I am at any time acting, and speaking, in the absence of what may seem sufficient reason. Since I cannot measure in each case how far to invest my will, I must trust myself to be up to calamities (the consequences of accidents, mistakes, inadvertence, clumsiness, thoughtlessness, foolishness, imprudence, hesitation, precipitousness, acts of God, and so on). (*Philosophy* 139)

Cavell's words suggest we would hardly be able to speak or act if we were to require of ourselves the kind of unambiguous clarity and certainty scepticism strives for. Such suspicion and doubt—both towards others and ourselves—constitutes the “the threat of skepticism” (*Philosophy* 139), while the above “trust” in our ability to cope with the inevitable mistakes or “calamities” that will necessarily arise from ambiguity and our lack of certainty is the “moral” of this threat, according to Cavell (*Philosophy* 139). Thus, for Cavell, scepticism is not, or not only, a “threat,” it also conveys a “truth,” as he explain in *The Claim of Reason*: “the truth of skepticism, or what I might call the moral of skepticism, namely, that the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing” (242). However, as discussed earlier, including when studying Hume's arguments in Chapter Three, scepticism brings about this truth (this realisation that our “relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing”) with an “anxiety about our human capacities as knowers” (*In Quest* 4). By contrast, poetry cultivates, conveys, fosters and celebrates the complexity, the wealth and the potential of our relationships to the world and of the meanings that we ascribe to things. Thus, unlike scepticism, poetry acknowledges and respects the ambiguities our uses of words harbour and the “vulnerability and inarticulateness” of our ordinary relations to things: “The skeptic *tells me* what I ordinarily ‘believe’ (for example, that the ‘world’ ‘exists’ as ‘my’ or ‘our’ ‘senses’ ‘inform’ me or us of it); he *replaces* my ordinary, the very vulnerability and inarticulateness of it, its inhabitability” (*Philosophy* 134). Cavell's choice to use the term “inhabitability” alongside “inarticulateness” suggests that even though our ordinary relationships to things leave *room* for mistakes arising from ambiguities and uncertainties, this *space*—which is a source of anxiety to the sceptic bent on certainty, who

seeks to close that gap—is the one in which we ordinarily live and use language. Poetry acknowledges, respects, celebrates, and fosters an awareness of that lofty, untidy dwelling place of ours—poetry makes it its playroom—and in doing so, poetry cultivates the aforementioned accommodation and trust, as opposed to scepticism’s doubts and demands. In other words, whereas scepticism “*replaces*” the uncertainties harboured by our ordinary relationships to things, people and the world as a whole, with doubts about what can be affirmed, poetry, cares for them, highlighting the wealth of meanings, interpretations, and relationships harboured by “the very vulnerability and inarticulateness” of the ordinary.

## 2. The De-Animating Threat of Scepticism and Poetry’s Re-Animating Response

So as to further discuss the question of the threat or problems that scepticism poses—and so as to understand better the relationship between the notion that poetry manifests care and how Cavell understands Romanticism to be a response to scepticism—I briefly turn to Cavell’s interpretation of *Othello*, which he discusses in *In Quest of the Ordinary*, but also in other works such as *The Claim of Reason* and *Disowning Knowledge*.<sup>79</sup> Cavell indeed writes of “Othello’s (other-minds) relation to Desdemona as an allegory (call it) of material-object skepticism” (*In Quest* 55). That is to say, for Cavell, Shakespeare’s character Othello is the archetype of the figure who falls prey to a scepticism that takes him from an ordinary, trusting, subject-to-subject relationship with Desdemona to one which is doubt-ridden, suspicious of her every ordinary word and behaviour, possessive, and objectifying—to the point that his sceptical quest for unambiguous certainty ultimately results in him smothering her. Othello illustrates how scepticism, in wanting to get a firm hold, or grasp, on things or people, is possessive, controlling, objectifying, and de-animating; it is able to turn an ordinary living person, or subject, into a corpse in its attempt to reach knowledge. This is why the welcoming of the ordinary, with its acknowledging re-domestication that does not objectify and that lets go of certainty by listening and being carefully attentive, as in subject-to-subject relationships, amounts to a revolution, a turning around from scepticism, which gives life back to the world: “Against a vision of the death of

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<sup>79</sup> *Disowning Knowledge*’s chapter entitled “Othello and the Stake of the Other” (125-142) is most relevant to this discussion, particularly the part where Cavell discusses Othello in relation to Descartes’s sceptical *Meditations*—a part he takes almost word for word from his earlier work *The Claim of Reason* (481-4).

the world, the romantic calling for poetry, or quest for it, the urgency of it, would be sensible . . . [;] the calling of poetry is to give the world back, to bring it back, as to life" (*In Quest* 44-5). Through its domestic welcoming of—and its careful listening to—the ordinary, as a way of doing away with and recovering from scepticism's de-animation and objectification, poetry de-objectifies and re-animates the world, notably by re-establishing trusting and accommodating stances towards it.<sup>80</sup> Because such stances are constitutive not only of subject-to-subject relationships, but also of how we ordinarily relate to the world, Cavell adds that "the task of bringing the world back, as to life . . . may, in turn, present itself as the quest for a return to the ordinary" (*In Quest* 52-3). This "return" to trusting and accommodating stances is also a turning around—or a revolution, in its etymological sense—insofar as scepticism's doubts and suspicions come *a posteriori*.<sup>81</sup>

If romanticism responds to scepticism by adopting a stance that gives life back to things through a receptive, accommodating, re-domesticating attentiveness towards the ordinary—and what scepticism perceives as its "opacity" (*Philosophy* 150)—and if doing so constitutes a revolution, a return to a more fundamental, *a priori* relationship towards things, then romanticism's interest in the ordinary is also a phenomenological one. I make this point because, in *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell writes: "It makes equal sense – at least equal – to suppose that the natural (or the biologically more primitive) condition of human perception is of (outward) things, whether objects or persons, as animated; so that it is the seeing of objects as objects (i.e. seeing them objectively, as non-animated) that is the sophisticated development" (441). I understand this idea—according to which seeing things as animated might be more "natural" or "biologically more primitive" than seeing them as inanimate objects—as a reframing, in biological terms, of Heidegger's phenomenological statements about the complexity of our relationships to things—which he argues we do not perceive, first and foremost, as sensory data input, but which we always already interpret in meaningful ways. Romantic poetry's interest in superstitious animism and its re-domestication of the ordinary—whereby relationships to things are not those of a subject

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<sup>80</sup> Cavell moreover writes of "the quest of poetry for the recovery of the world (which I am interpreting as the recovery of, or from, the thing in itself), this way of joining the philosophical effort to recover from skepticism" (*In Quest* 45). Cavell's term recovery, like the aforementioned "withdrawal" or "dispossession" refers to the idea that scepticism leads to the world—what it truly is according to knowledge—being set at a remove from the subject's grasp to the point of reaching Kant's noumenal world, beyond experience, as thing in itself.

<sup>81</sup> I discuss Cavell's idea that animism constitutes the *a priori* stance further down, including in the paragraph to which footnote 11 pertains.

towards an object of knowledge—is thus also revolutionary insofar as it involves turning back towards, and being attentive to, relationships to things that are phenomenologically fundamental.<sup>82</sup>

Another way in which Romantic poetry's response to scepticism, according to Cavell, returns us to something fundamental about ourselves and our relations to the world is pointed out by Stephen Mulhall: scepticism not only de-animates or kills the world by objectifying it, the world's death deadens us too. Cavell indeed writes that the sceptic "denies that the phenomena of the world matter to him in any way . . . [and] strips the objects of the world of their variegated specificity and value. He annihilates the world by annihilating its capacity to elicit his interest; he is driven past caring for it; it goes dead for him" (*Stanley* 154).<sup>83</sup> Mulhall's reading of Cavell is useful to this investigation because it highlights the relationship between scepticism and inauthentic care, since being "driven past caring" suggests the inauthenticity of "Indifferent modes" of caring that Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* (158). Conversely, poetry, as well as giving life back to the world by being receptive to the ordinary and by pointing out the wealth of meaning that ordinary things, and our relationships to them, harbour, also gives one back one's capacity to care authentically—and as Chapter One of this investigation has pointed out, giving one back one's capacity to care is characteristic of helpful solicitude (*Being* 158-9).

Moreover, just as Chapter One established that poetry pertains to authentic care by comparing it to a subject-to-subject relationship (helpful solicitude), so too does Cavell

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<sup>82</sup> Cavell moreover explains how even the sceptic initially behaves in a way characteristic of subject-to-subject relationships—insofar as he demands of (ordinary) things justifications, oaths, proofs—as in a trial, as if they could speak, and be made accountable for the *claims* he considers them to be making about their truth: "the philosopher turns the world into, or puts it in the position of, a speaker, lodging its claims upon us . . ." (*Disowning* 7-8). The fact that modern sceptic philosophers, such as Descartes, place the world in the position of a speaker, Cavell argues, is revealed by their use of the vocabulary of doubt, belief and trust, which are terms that apply to people and their discourse: "Doubt, like belief, is most fully, say originally, directed to claims of others, of speakers" (*Disowning* 7). However, immediately after putting the world in this position of a subject or speaker, sceptics objectify them, thereby de-animating and silencing them, and they set out to get a *grasp*, or *hold*, of the truth independently and objectively, i.e. without even their own subjectivity—hence, also, the deadening of the self that Mulhall was previously quoted pointing out.

<sup>83</sup> Both Mulhall and Cavell are aware that there is a similar vocabulary of violent grasping in Heidegger's work; Mulhall cites (*Stanley* 157), for instance, the following words from Cavell's *Disowning Knowledge*: "This violence in human knowing is, I gather, what comes out of Heidegger's perception that philosophy has, from the beginning, but, if I understand, with increasing velocity in the age of technology, conceived knowledge under the aegis of dominion, of the concept of a concept as a matter, say, of grasping a thing" (9).

explain how scepticism constitutes a threat—how it pertains to *inauthentic* care—by comparing it to deadly subject-to-subject relationship (Othello’s behaviour towards Desdemona). Cavell thus writes that “scepticism with respect to the other is not a generalized *intellectual* lack, but a stance I take in the face of the other’s opacity and the demand the other’s expression places upon me; I call scepticism my denial or annihilation of the other. It is epitomized in what happens in to the other’s body, as when Othello’s imagination turns Desdemona into alabaster” (*Philosophy* 150). Cavell’s idea that scepticism is a stance one *takes* underscores the moral responsibility one has in choosing to adopt it, since it is not an *a priori* stance. His term “opacity” highlights how the sceptic does not adapt or accommodate to the other—requesting clarification or *enlightenment*, demanding the darkness to be lit, instead of acknowledging that darkness, of adjusting to it and joining their own ordinary opacity to it through dialogue. Indeed, Cavell argues that scepticism regarding others is their “denial” because just as the sceptic challenges statement such as ‘I see the table’ by saying “‘you don’t see the back half of the object,’” (*Philosophy* 149) so too do they say “in the case of other minds that you don’t know what’s going on in the other, who might, say, be feigning what you say she feels” (*Philosophy* 149). In both examples, by replacing ordinary trust with doubt about truth, the sceptic’s stance is that of a subject—of a self-centred and Cartesian kind trusting only that *cogito ergo sum*—who requires clarification regarding something uncertain, opaque, not comprehensively grasped.<sup>84</sup> Scepticism as Cavell describes it is therefore a refusal to trust, to accommodate, to accept, respect, and listen to—i.e. it does not authentically care for—the opaque, the unknown, the uncertain, the ambiguous, the undisclosed or the mysterious. Romantic poetry, by contrast, takes the opposite approach and sees this not as a gap to be closed, an ambiguity to be lifted, or an obscurity to be lit by reason, but considers this dark space of uncertainty to be harbouring a wealth of meanings. Moreover, it recognises that it is the space we fundamentally, ordinarily, and phenomenologically dwell in, or inhabit—since “the human creature’s basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing” (*The Claim* 242).

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<sup>84</sup> This stance’s objectification or “annihilation” and self-centredness characterises most of Shakespeare’s tragic figures, Cavell further explains: “Timon shows the misanthrope, like the narcissist, to be a type of the skeptic” (*Philosophy* 154) and “Othello [is], the obvious narcissist among Shakespeare’s tragic heroes” (*Philosophy* 147).

Romantic poets therefore have an interest in the supernatural and extraordinary because they are opportunities to draw attention to how we fundamentally, ordinarily, and phenomenologically care. The sentence following the previously quoted one about bringing the world back to life thus reads: “Hence romantics seem to involve themselves in what look to us to be superstitious, discredited mysteries of animism, sometimes in the form of what is called the pathetic fallacy” (*In Quest* 45). “The Thorn,” as Chapter Three of this investigation has shown, is an example of this interest in the superstitious ordinary. Indeed, because our ordinary relationships to things contain a meaning-ascribing complexity that does not treat them solely as objections from a rational and detached stance, these ordinary relationships also contain the risk of falling prey to a superstitious animism that treats things as subjects imbued with feelings and emotions (the pathetic fallacy). The risk of animism, therefore, is ventriloquism: speaking for someone or something instead of being attentive to it, of listening to it and to what it reveals of one’s relationships to the world—and instead of noticing what this listening provokes in oneself so as to learn something about oneself in doing so. Wordsworth’s superstitious narrator in his poem “The Thorn,” as was argued in the previous chapter, displays such ventriloquism when he is tempted to believe that the place of the thorn speaks of a truth about someone else’s experience (Martha’s).<sup>85</sup> Cavell’s arguments are thus helpful in order to understand what the notion that poetry manifests care reveals about Wordsworth’s ideas, and this further becomes apparent when considering the following extract from the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* in which Wordsworth explains that his aim is “to choose incidents and situations from common life . . . presented to the mind in an unusual aspect”:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. (*Prose*, 1:123-4)

If ordinary people commonly relate to things in ways that are far more complex than alleged objective detachment, and if this ordinary relationship has something animistic to

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<sup>85</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Three, several critics—both Wordsworth’s contemporaries and more recent ones—have argued that Wordsworth falls prey to the same flaw as his narrator; even “Coleridge urges Wordsworth to speak in his own voice, from his own experience, and thus to abandon the ventriloquism that awkwardly places his sentiments in other mouths” (Fischer 556).



it, then our reactions and relationships to things perceived as uncanny or animated, to things which have something supernatural and mysterious about them, can tell us something about us, about our fundamental and spontaneous relationships to things—and what we consider these to be—prior to any objectification and detachment. Wordsworth’s intention of “tracing . . . the primary laws of our nature” suggest he seeks such fundamental and *a priori* relationships. His choice to focus on “the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement” also indicates this, since he thereby makes it clear he is not interested in *a posteriori* stances of composure and rational reasoning—a mood Heidegger refers to with the terms *rhastone* and *diagoge* (*Being* 130), as briefly discussed in Chapter Two. An interest in the ordinary—in the sense of fundamental, spontaneous, or “humble and rustic” reactions and behaviours, as Wordsworth puts it—therefore converges with an interest in the supernatural and uncanny.

Presenting common things “in an unusual aspect” is moreover useful insofar as familiarity with ordinary things can lead us to believe that we *know* what they are and how they are to be related to—a stance even worse, in this respect, than scepticism, since it negates the existence of uncertainty.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, infusing ordinary things, as poetry can, with something supernatural, or even simply relating their story—telling for instance, all that an old milk pan has ‘witnessed’ over the centuries, as if it had a life—not only allows us to get a glimpse of something fundamental about our relationships to the world, it also challenges the knowledge we think we have of those things.<sup>87</sup> This is a point Coleridge also explains when describing Wordsworth’s “endeavours” (6) in *Lyrical Ballads*:

Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (6)

Poetry’s “awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom” is a challenge to our sense of “familiarity” or certainty—to the impression of knowledge, i.e. the feeling that there is nothing more to something. It invites us to become aware of, and to reconsider,

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<sup>86</sup> Such lack of questioning—and such taking meanings for granted as if there was nothing ambiguous—also partly explains Heidegger’s criticism of our everyday ways of being in *Being and Time*.

<sup>87</sup> My example of the milk pan is a reference to Emerson’s following words from “The American Scholar” (discussed in Chapter Two of this investigation): “What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan . . .” (*Essays* 68-9).

our relationships with, our uses of, our behaviours towards, and our definitions of things and the world. This reconsideration, in turn, gives rise to the possibility of caring authentically by recognising and respecting the wealth of potential meanings that things, and our relationships to them, harbour (their “inexhaustible treasure”).<sup>88</sup>

This awareness and reconsideration of both our relationships with things and of their potential happens in and through language, as Richard Rorty points out in his *Essays on Heidegger and Others*:

The greater the ease with which we use that language, the less able we are to *hear* the words of that language, and so the less able we are to think of language as such. To think of language as such, in this sense, is to think of the fact that no language is fated or necessitated. . . . [we tend] to forget about the possibility of alternative languages, and thus of alternative beings to those we know . . . we Westerners tend to think of poets referring to the same old beings under fuzzy new metaphorical descriptions, instead of thinking of poetic acts as the original openings up of the world, the acts which let new sorts of beings be. (45)

Poetry can help us remember, or become aware of, the fact that our uses of words are tied to our understandings of what things are, Rorty explains. Although this passage puts forward how he understands Heidegger’s ideas, the forgetfulness he mentions, as well as the notion of an awakening from a sense of familiarity (“the same old beings”) finds some of its origins, or is anticipated, in the views put forward by Wordsworth in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. Indeed, the British poet argues that men living rural lives “convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions” and “a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets” (*Prose*, 1:125). When poets latter substitute an ordinary, local, rural language with more elaborate or refined terms, they convey a less concrete, more fleeting, adulterate or reduced version of what people genuinely experience; conversely, the former language is “more philosophical” in that its specificities correspond to an existential and ontological wealth to be respected and which one can learn from. Wordsworth just chooses to keep to “language really used by men,” because uses of words articulate and reveal our relationships to the world: the ontological complexity or paucity we see in the world is reflected in the paucity or the complexity of the words we use (which is why they are “philosophical”). If we do not want to reduce the ontological complexity of the world—if we wish to respect it—we must acknowledge the linguistic and semantic complexity of words and therefore resist reductive

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<sup>88</sup> I discuss in more detail the notion of reconsideration, and poetry’s role in it, later on in this chapter.

temptations of substituting vernacular words or their combinations with impoverishing approximations and synonyms.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, while ordinary and local uses of language can be used to point out one's culture's specificity, when this specificity is presented to someone outside that culture, the effect can be similar to that of a literary encounter with the uncanny or supernatural. Indeed, whether local readers becomes aware, through the poem, of their own culture's ontological and semantic wealth, or whether more foreign readers are struck by the otherness of another culture's ontological and semantic complexity (such as that of a rural dialect), what becomes possible through poetry's presentation of specific languages or ways of speaking is, in both cases, an opening or reconsideration of one's definitions of—and relationships to—things. An increased awareness of how one's use of words expresses these definitions and relationships also becomes possible. In other words, poetry can challenge the sense of knowledge induced either by familiarity or by philosophy. The use of an alternative language or dialect is not necessary: one of the ways in which one can be reminded of, or given to consider "the possibility of alternative languages, and thus of alternative beings"—which we tend to "forget" as Rorty writes above—is by confronting us with an unusual, unfamiliar, or remarkable use of language. For the educated upper classes used to, or expecting, a refined use of language in poetry (drawing, for instance, on French, Latin, and Greek), Wordsworth's "simple and unelaborated expressions" of ordinary rural people constitutes such a remarkable and unusual use of language, and may have the effect described above.<sup>90</sup> One of the things that make a passage in a play or a descriptive passage

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<sup>89</sup> For further discussions of this point, see *Defending Poetry* by David-Antoine Williams, particularly part one entitled "Ethics, Literature and the Place of Poetry" as well as *Ethics and Dialogue* by Michael Eskin, particularly the subsection entitled "Ethics and Poetry" in chapter one, section one. There would be a lot to say about how poetry can contribute—and has indeed contributed—to the safekeeping and estimating of local languages, dialects, and customs (for Scotland, the works of Robert Burns and Walter Scott come to mind). Likewise, it would be interesting to discuss how such ideas are linked to Emerson and Heidegger's nationalisms, particularly to the former's call for a distinctly American poetry, emancipated from Britain, and to the latter's interest in the idiosyncrasies of the German culture and language, including in opposition to the cultural influence of the United States. There is no room, however, for a thorough exploration of such questions in this investigation; my aim in pointing out that these relationships exist, is to argue that these authors share the idea that local ontologies and ways of being (of relating to things and the world) are reflected in local languages and ways of thinking and expressing oneself.

<sup>90</sup> There are limits, however, to the extent to which Wordsworth is willing to use the simple and rural language: "[t]he language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) . . ." (*Prose*, 1:125). Likewise, he adds: "I cannot, however, be insensible to the present outcry against the triviality and meanness, both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally

in a novel poetic, for instance, is when its author's careful choice of words makes the readers or spectators become aware of that care, of that remarkably attentive and alternative use of language. In other words—Rorty's—a text is poetic when it enables readers or an audience to "hear" or to cease to "forget" the possibilities that language(s) hold(s)—i.e. their semantic potential and ontological wealth, the fact that they are, as he puts it, "openings up of the world." Indeed, a poem differs from works in other literary genres in that, even when it is written in prose, it presents and relates to language in ways which stand out from other ways language is usually used, including in other literary genres. Not only are poems often characterised by unique and careful uses of words, they often deliberately brings the reader's attention to the fact that words are uniquely and careful used; they manifest a different, remarkable, use of language—and when they do not, it is often to invite readers to confront their expectations, or in order to question what poems are and do. Poetry therefore manifests authentic care insofar as it both displays and brings about an attentive, considerate, and reflexive—questioning and self-aware—relationship to words, their uses, and to what these tell us about our ontologies and the wealth or paucity of how we see and define things—including poems. While such views of poetry, like Rorty's ideas, pertain to contemporary, post-Heideggerian poetics, some of its origins are present in Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*—and Cavell's ideas help make this apparent.

### **3. Poetry's Acknowledgement and Reconsideration: Ethical Openness to Otherness.**

There is, moreover, another way in which Cavell's thoughts—about how scepticism, and the ethical threat it poses, can be overcome—further reveal how poetry such as Wordsworth's "The Thorn" manifests care and fosters authentic care. In another chapter of *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*, I understand Cavell to be suggesting that when scepticism regarding others arises, though it poses an ethically problematic stumbling block, it may be scaled, avoided, or recovered from, and need not systematically lead to morally tragic ends (such as *Othello's*). Cavell indeed writes that overstepping or

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introduced into their metrical compositions . . . " (*Prose*, 1:125). Wordsworth is not interested, his words indicate, in transcribing, or in inviting his readers to reflect upon, the relationships to things that ordinary vulgarity, for instance, may disclose. He is less radical, in this respect, than a poet like Robert Burns—whose poem "Why Should Na Poor Folk Mowe," for example, Wordsworth would have considered lewd and disapproved of, given his above statements.

overcoming the opacity of the other may be done by “taking the problem of the other in rather the reverse direction from the way philosophers tend to conceive the matter, letting it provoke him to learn something about himself from the encounter: it is not the other that poses the first barrier to my knowledge of him or her, but myself” (*Philosophy* 233). “The Thorn,” as my reading of it has shown in Chapter Three, constitutes an invitation to realise this, as it provides a counterexample: the narrator fails to “learn something about himself,” including from his “encounter” with Martha; he does not realise that he himself “poses the first barrier” to his knowledge of what has happened to Martha. Cavell explains that the opacity of the other—rather, what the sceptical stance sees as a problem, as an opacity (*Philosophy* 150)—presents an opportunity to “learn” something about oneself, about one’s sceptical stance, provided one *lets* this opacity do its *provoking* work. What this means is that one may realise that seeing the other as opaque triggers or “provoke[s]” a suspicion and a desire for comprehension—a desire that may set one on a potentially tragic and unethical quest for unambiguous certainty. Cavell’s use of the term “letting it provoke” underscores that what is necessary is a receptive stance towards oneself, that is to say, a welcoming attitude towards the only undeniable, true and certain *subject* that is left in the Cartesian’s sceptical, objectifying eyes—which is the self, the ‘I,’ as in Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum*. Moreover, though Cavell does not mention poetry, his idea of going in “the reverse direction from the way philosophers tend to conceive the matter” allows for the thought that literature provides the less knowledge-seeking, less detached and less reason-based approach that leads out of scepticism.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, literature, and poetry in particular, insofar as it draws attention to words, to things, and to our relationships with these, offers

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<sup>91</sup> The notion that the “reverse direction” leads to poetry is also suggested by Heidegger’s *Kehre*—his turn to poetry and to more poetic ways of expressing his own ideas, which is mentioned in Chapter One of this investigation. Moreover, Cavell writes that “the tasks of philosophy are to be compared (not identified) with therapies” (*Philosophy* 235), which suggests that psychoanalysis may be a way for the sceptic to both realise and become reconciled with the idea that the self is also opaque to the self—as Freud, whom Cavell repeatedly discusses, points out. The idea that the other is no more and no less opaque, or a problem, than the self is to the self might even be part of the learning about oneself that Cavell mentions. Psychoanalysis reveals that even though the self may be opaque to the self, one may learn something about and from one’s self not by considering oneself as an object but through a receptive letting one’s self unfold through dialogue and listening. Indeed, psychoanalysis does not have patients try to dissect consciously—or try to get a firm grasp of—their own selves as though these were objects for a sceptical and detached self to *comprehend*. Likewise, learning something about and from *another* self, or subject, involves having—or learning—a similar receptive stance of listening and dialogue, which includes accommodation and the acceptance of ordinary ambiguities.

opportunities for such a letting oneself be *provoked* into learning something about oneself. This is one way of understanding Emerson's idea that "[t]ruly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul," (*Essays* 79) a statement which is the epigraph to Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*. This is also what I understand a poem like "The Thorn" to do: it provokes and provides an opportunity to become aware of how we care, including inauthentically.

Wordsworth, Emerson, Heidegger, and Cavell thus all point out the limits—the reductive nature and the ontological paucity—of several relationships with things, and of their corresponding discourses about those things, such as those of scientific materialism, technological production, modern scepticism, or familiar idle talk. Conversely, those authors also suggest alternative relationships to things that are ontologically richer and more respectful of complexity. While in Heidegger's works, such relationships are described, for instance, in terms of poetic dwelling and letting-be, Stephen Mulhall usefully describes Cavell's ideas on "what acknowledging the world might be thought to amount to" as follows (*Stanley* 160):

rather than imposing our general preconceptions about objecthood on to a given object, we bring ourselves to consider what our everyday experiences of and with that object (our intelligible intuitions of it) can teach us about its specific, distinct nature. By reconsidering our responses to it, the treatment and attitude it can and does elicit from us, we simultaneously acknowledge that and how it attracts us; acknowledging that we are drawn to it leads us to consider how it draws us, to reconsider what it is about it that draws us, and so to consider anew precisely what it is. (*Stanley* 161)

Two key ideas are repeated in this description: acknowledgement and (re)consideration. These two notions and the reflexive, self-conscious position described here, need to be further discussed in relation both to the ethical nature of this alternative relationship with things, and to the notion that poetry manifests care. How poetry can be, in the way described above, what helps us "bring ourselves to consider" (what "leads us to consider . . . anew") our relationships with things and what they *are* for us also needs to be considered so as to continue investigating the ways in which Cavell's works both shed light on and further develop Wordsworth, Emerson, and Heidegger's views on poetry—in particular the notion that it manifests care.

So as to discuss the above ideas of acknowledgement and reconsideration, it is helpful to consider their connection with "how philosophy might reanimate the sceptic's world, [and] the answer would seem to be that the philosopher should acknowledge the

world—acknowledge it as his necessary other whose existence is both separate from and essential to his own,” as Mulhall puts it (*Stanley* 158). What this means he explains in the following words:

acknowledging its separateness would mean accepting the independence of what attracts him, not imposing his interests and needs upon it but rather allowing it to elicit the responses it requires and requests from him in its own way and according to its own nature. Such ideas constitute the transference of one way of conceptualizing a loving relation between human beings to the domain of relations between a human being and the world. (*Stanley* 158-9)

Unlike the sceptic’s grasping and knowledge-seeking objectification, the relationship of acknowledgement described here is akin to an interpersonal one. That is to say, this acknowledgement manifests not only what Cavell suggests is a fundamental tendency of ours of seeing the world as animated, but it grants the world and things the kind of careful respect we would grant a loved one when, say, having a conversation. The idea of acknowledging *separateness* may seem incompatible with Heidegger’s idea of going beyond the subject-object distinction, or Emerson’s ideas about unity of mind and matter, of perceiver and object perceived. However, as far as Emerson is concerned, because his insistence on unity is a way of arguing for the end of detached objectification, what lies at the centre of the idea of unity is a recognition of the other as related or similar. That is to say, if Emerson argues for unity, it is because this possibility of a *correspondence*, of a dialogue between poet and world entails the recognition or acknowledgement of the world as this other which is of the same fabric as the eye—or ‘I’—that beholds it. This notion of separateness is moreover present in Heidegger’s ideas if one bears in mind what the first chapter of this investigation pointed out about authentic care in *Being and Time*: in his discussion of solicitude, Heidegger emphasises the fact that what distinguishes this kind of help—and what makes it pertain to *authentic* care—is the fact that the other person is treated as an equally care-ful person, capable of autonomous and independent caring.<sup>92</sup> That is to say, not only is the person not considered as an object, it is also not pitied, nor considered incapable, careless, inferior, or as a person for whom things have to be done. That is to say, this idea of fully acknowledging the other, of fully respecting their being in all

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<sup>92</sup> The ethical aspect of the acknowledgment of the other’s separateness is further stressed by Simon Critchley who suggests, in *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing*, a parallel between Cavell’s views and Levinas’s: “The Cavellian need to accept the limitedness of human cognition, the need for acknowledgement of the other’s separateness from me and my own irreducible separation can be placed alongside Levinas’s account of the ethical relation to the other exceeding the bonds of knowledge” (197n).

its potential is both the core characteristic of authentic care, and of Mulhall's words above. What Mulhall describes is thus what brings together, on the one hand, Heidegger's early ideas in *Being and Time* on the authentic caring solicitude towards other people and, on the other hand, the thoughts he expresses in his later essays on dwelling and authentic caring towards things and the world as a whole.

The Cavellian alternative to the modern sceptic philosopher's stance is therefore not only in keeping with the notion that poetry manifests authentic care, what characterises it is particularly worth discussing because doing so allows for a better understanding of the ethical aspect of the way of being poetry manifests. In order to continue discussing this ethical dimension, it is worth going back to the "loving relation" that Mulhall mentions in the extract quoted above. Because this is such a vague expression, and because its ethical nature is far from obvious, what needs to be established at this point is why this term is linked to the aforementioned idea of respectful recognition of the other person's being. In order to do so, and because I have just argued that the latter acknowledgement is part of the authentic care that poetry manifests according to Heidegger, it is worth briefly recalling how this idea of a "loving relation" is present in Heidegger's works too. Indeed, just as in the passage quoted above Mulhall writes about a "transference" of the loving relation between two people to the relation between a person and the world, Heidegger writes about "the return from the realm of objects and their representation into the innermost region of the heart's space" (*Poetry* 129-30)—a space which happens to be where a person's inclination towards those "for him to love" occurs (*Poetry* 125). In other words, for Heidegger too the poet's relation to things has something in common with the love human beings are inclined to have towards people they respect, attend to, and *care* for.<sup>93</sup> Heidegger does not mention spouses or partners, which rules out romantic love or passion that one might associate with the dangers of a possessive desire—or one prone to jealousy, as in *Othello*. Instead, he mentions people whose beings are valued, cared for and respected, even though they are out of one's reach or hold ("the dead" and "those who are to come"), i.e., even though their lack of actuality, or presence, could have led to them not being granted Being—on the shallow grounds that they *are* not (not yet, or not any longer) and because of a conflation of being, substance, and existence.

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<sup>93</sup> "Heidegger's words about how "[o]nly in the invisible innermost of the heart is man inclined toward what there is for him to love: the forefathers, the dead, the children, those who are to come" (*Poetry* 125) are discussed in more detail in Chapter One of this investigation.



What love—and its transference to things—implies is therefore the *acknowledgement* of Being as well as *careful attention*, or respect for it in a disinterested, non-possessive way that does not limit or circumscribe what that being is. What is at stake is, consequently, not only ontology—acknowledgement of being—but also ethics, i.e. attentive care, or respect for that being. In other words, Heidegger and Mulhall's references to love stress the fact that the ontological recognition at stake in poetry or in the recovery from scepticism is not *merely* a simple acknowledgement of existence, but one that is respectful of and carefully attentive to that Being—which is what makes it ethical and authentically caring, as Chapter One of this investigation demonstrated.

So as to take this idea further and bring Emerson's views back into this discussion, it is worth quoting the following sentences from "The Poet," where the American thinker also mentions love: "The path of things is silent. Will they suffer a speaker to go with them? A spy they will not suffer; a lover, a poet, is the transcendency of their own nature,—him they will suffer. The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms, and accompanying that" (*Essays* 459). Emerson makes the poet the *lover* of things and, in this case also, this lover is not a possessive one, but one who, instead of being active, simply *resigns himself*. It is his respectful "accompanying" things (on their silent path) that allows the poet to voice the things' true being (their name). By contrast, a spy's inquisitive and detached prying into the things' being would not be both ontological *and* ethical. Moreover, what characterises poets and lovers is that they are, to things, like the "transcendency of their own nature" which I understand in a way similar to the aforementioned idea of unity. That is to say, the relationship here described recognises the other (the thing) as equal to the poet in "nature" which means it is not considered fundamentally different. The things do not even need the poet on their silent path; the poet's presence is simply tolerated (suffered). This attentive caution and care, with which the poet treads in his respectful love for things, is also characteristic of Heidegger's dweller—who, as was pointed out in the first part of this investigation, is both akin to the figure of the poet and described in terms of care, such as sparing, saving, tarrying with, and cultivating. The idea that *love* is also a term that describes this figure is suggested by Heidegger scholar Julian Young who writes, in *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* that "the most salient characteristic in Heidegger's portrayal of the dweller is, in fact, love" (122). What I understand the term "love" to be referring to, as it is used by Young, Heidegger, Emerson, and Mulhall in his reading of Cavell, is authentic

care, such as this investigation has defined it. It means, in other words, respectful and careful attentiveness to the other's Being, which implies ontological recognition of the other.

This acknowledgement of Being is moreover ethical because it is *not* knowledge. Indeed, knowledge implies defining, limiting, and with knowledge comes a certainty akin to the assurance of familiarity from which reconsideration is absent—since one is confident of knowing what that thing is and how to relate to or behave towards it. Conversely, when one does not know what something is, be it a plant, a tool, an animal, or an unknown substance, one is cautious when interacting with it or handling it. For instance, one does not want to get hurt nor cause any damage to whatever is at stake, so one is careful while trying to determine or define both what that thing or being *is* and how to handle or interact with it in mutually respectful ways. That is to say, attentiveness to the Being of whatever is at stake and to one's behaviour or relationship with it are concomitant since the two are related and are defined together. In contrast with knowledge, acknowledgement does not put limits around—i.e. does not precisely define or circumscribe—neither a thing's being nor one's relationship with it. The term authentic care indicates this deliberate lack of definition and the caution that goes with it. It is a behaviour commonly associated with relations towards people—whom we can never *know* but whom we have to trust or believe. However, the fact that we exert a similar caution (or care) towards unknown things—say, unknown plants, tools, or animals—is a further indication that our relationships to people and our relationships to things are not fundamentally different, as Cavell's idea of a fundamental tendency to consider things as animated also suggests (*The Claim* 441). Two concepts are therefore central to the notion of authentic care: otherness and openness. Openness because just as defining, circumscribing or limiting go with knowledge, acknowledgement goes with the opposite, openness. Otherness because this lack of definition—the openness of acknowledgement—turns whatever is at stake into an *other* whose being is open, undefined, and potentially like me, i.e. a living or animate person.

In a passage from "Between Philosophy and Literature" Gerald Bruns thus usefully explains how viewing something as being able to speak to us means treating it less as an object to be known and considering it more like someone to be acknowledged:

whatever speaks to me transforms itself from an object into an Other, even as in the same stroke it transforms me from a consciousness designed for framing representations into a person summoned into action in the world. I am transported out of the domain of instrumental reasoning into the region of the ethical, where the ethical no longer means the subjective possession of values and beliefs but rather means openness to the otherness of the Other. (243)

What poetry's respectful re-animating and caring acknowledgement does, therefore, is transport us into an ethical position characteristic of interpersonal relationships since "[i]t is in the nature of other people, of the Other, to resist our totalizing gaze. . . . We are never in a position to *know* other people; we are, however, under pressure to acknowledge them," Bruns writes (242-3). This idea that we cannot claim to *know* other people was discussed earlier in this investigation, particularly by referring to Cavell's comparison of the sceptic to Othello, but it is also an put forward by a writer who was both a novelist and a philosopher: Iris Murdoch. In her novel *Under the Net*, she thus writes: "When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feel even the need of it. But then what one achieves is no longer knowledge, it is simply a kind of co-existence; and this too is one of the guises of love" (268). The only knowledge claim we can truthfully make when it comes to people, Murdoch argues, is the Socratic claim that all we know is that we do not know them. As a result, and because, as Murdoch writes in *Existentialists and Mystics*, "[t]he formulation of beliefs about other people often proceeds and must proceed imaginatively and under a direct pressure of the will," (199) we need to have a cautious, attentive, and careful behaviour. "We have to *attend* to people, we may have to have *faith* in them," she continues (*Existentialists* 199). Cavell's aforementioned point pour trust a similar point; likewise, in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, he writes: "How do we learn that what we need is not more knowledge but the willingness to forgo knowing? . . . The world is to be *accepted*; as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged" (*Must* 324). The idea of an acknowledgement that is a renunciation and an acceptance—in other words, an ungrasping, a *Gelassenheit* or letting-go—which itself leads to "a kind of co-existence" which is "one of the guises of love," as Murdoch puts it, matches the conditions necessary for authentic care. Indeed, like Heidegger's poet's being-with and dwelling with things—sparing, cultivating and tarrying with them—the respectful acknowledgment Murdoch describes opens up the possibility of caring authentically for another. Moreover, her framing of the term "love" suggests an understanding of that term which is similar to this chapter's earlier discussion of this word. Her views, like Bruns's, are further indications that poetry's authentically caring relationship to things, whereby the poet adopts a

receptive stance of listening and letting-be—as towards another person, notably when being helpfully solicitous—is an ethical one.

The above parallel with interpersonal relationships makes even more apparent the pitfall of ventriloquism, of superstitious animism, or of claiming to have acquired a mystical comprehensive comprehension of something. Indeed, just as it would be unethical to claim to be able to speak for someone without their consent, or to claim to have knowledge of, or authority over someone else—including their story—so too is the poet *inauthentically* caring if they “leap” in (Heidegger, *Being* 158) and speak *for* or *as* a thing instead of listening and responding to it, as an interlocutor. When the poet does the latter, they respect that thing’s Being, as they would that of a person, because they do not claim to have comprehensive knowledge, nor to reveal the one, absolute, objective truth about that thing. Instead, the Being they disclose is the *a priori*, phenomenologically fundamental, and contingent Being that reveals that thing’s place within a network of relations—the world to which the poet and the thing belong. Moreover, if such ontological acknowledgement and respect for a thing’s Being implies openness and otherness, it is because acknowledgement, unlike knowledge, puts one in front of one’s choices and responsibilities regarding how to relate or behave towards whatever being (thing or person) is at stake. This idea is salient in Mulhall’s previously quoted passage where he insists on the idea of reconsidering one’s “responses,” and “attitude” (Stanley 161) but it is also a point made by Julian Young who, writing about Heidegger’s views, stresses the importance of pondering about how to act when he argues that “ontology is ethics. . . . To adopt . . . a proper relation to Being and to truth . . . to become, in other words, one who dwells, is to understand a great deal about how one is to act or, at least, about how one is to ‘ponder’ about how to act. It is, in short, to possess an ethics” (119-120). Young’s words are about Heidegger’s figure of the dweller, but given the connections discussed in Chapter One of this investigation between dweller and poet, Young’s statement suggest that when a poet’s attitude towards things is characterised by ontological and ethical acknowledgement and respect, then this authentically caring way of being manifests itself in a cautious, reflexive pondering, as opposed to assertive knowledge. Poetry therefore harbours an ethical potential when it invites its readers to reconsider their “responses” to things and “the treatment and attitude” things can and do “elicit” from them—to use Mulhall’s words once again (Stanley 161)—which is also what Chapter Three of this investigation has argued “The Thorn” achieves. To say this in yet another way that recapitulates what was said earlier, poetry

manifests authentic care if it requires, brings about, or fosters a relationship to something whereby the latter's Being is acknowledged and respected, i.e. where things are no longer considered as objects whose Beings are defined, but as others whose Beings are not *known* but left in an openness that invites us to be careful, respectful, and accepting of the complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty that they—and our relationships towards them—harbour. What poetry then achieves is what Cavell describes in *In Quest of the Ordinary*, when he writes:

Imagine, if we can, someone's finding himself or herself struck by a treatment of flowers (a particularly nervous handling of them, or a special decorum in their presence, or a refusal to cut them, or perhaps a horror of cutting them, or a panic upon dropping them) in such a way that he is led to *consider* what flowers are, *what* it is he takes himself to know about what is and is not appropriate in our treatment of them. (69)

If similar invitations to (re)consider our ways of behaving towards, or of relating to, other beings, including things, are present in poetry, how, then, are they expressed? More specifically, is this invitation visible in a poet's relationship to language—for instance, does it translate in an equally cautious and considerate use of words? In other words, how are the above ideas present in poetry and how are they relevant for a discussion of the work that poets do? This chapter's earlier discussion of Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* put forward several suggestions regarding how the poet's remarkable use of language can challenge and interrogate, however, these early points stemmed from a discussion of scepticism and primarily stressed the connections between Wordsworth, Emerson, Heidegger, and Cavell's ideas. A more in-depth study of such points is now called for, and in order to do so, it is worth turning briefly to Simon Critchley's ideas about poetry as they give further insights into how the notion that poetry manifests care is relevant for the history of ideas and how it is philosophically connected to the above discussion of Cavell's views.

#### **4. Poetry's Philosophical Potential and Ordinary Language Philosophy.**

In his essay "Surfaciality," Simon Critchley writes:

Poetry returns us to our familiarity with things through the de-familiarization of poetic saying, it provides lessons in unlearning where we finally see what is under our noses. What the poet discovers is what we knew already, but had covered up: the world in its plain simplicity and palpable presence. In this way we reach lucidity[,] . . . a lucidity at the level of feeling that the poetic word articulates without making cognitively explicitly. . . . Poetry produces felt variations in the appearances of things that return us to the understanding of things that we endlessly pass over in our desire for knowledge. (287)

Critchley's description of poetry as something that "returns us to our familiarity with things" suggests that Cavell's statement about Romanticism as "the quest for a return to the ordinary" (*In Quest* 53) can be broadened to poetry beyond this particular nineteenth-century artistic movement. Likewise, the idea that this return to the ordinary happens through poetry's "de-familiarization" and "lessons in unlearning" indicates that the aforementioned philosophical ideas about separateness, otherness, acknowledgement, and reconsideration are relevant for poetry as a whole. Critchley's above description, according to which "[p]oetry produces felt variations in the appearance of things," also underscores how Wordsworth's idea about how "ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect" (*Prose*, 1:123) has a philosophical relevance beyond his own and beyond Romanticism. I stress this point because Critchley writes the above words in the context of an analysis of a kind of poetry which presents itself as the *opposite* of a poetry where "stones have souls and rivers feel ecstasy in the moonlight" (282)—i.e., the opposite of Romantic poetry if one considers the latter to focus on "discredited mysteries of animism, sometimes in the form of what is called the pathetic fallacy" (Cavell, *In Quest* 45). Critchley's ideas are therefore helpful to understand how different forms of poetry manifest care and how apparently diverging arguments about poetry can ultimately converge and be compatible—much in the same way that Cavell argues that Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP) and Romanticism (which, at first, do not seem to have much in common) are both reactions to scepticism.<sup>94</sup> This does not mean, however, that Critchley writes about poetry the same thing Cavell writes about OLP. Although there are similarities, one important difference lies in the fact that the "lucidity," the revelation that poetry brings about regarding the complexity of our relationships with things is not "cognitively explicit" according to Critchley; it is "a lucidity at the level of feeling." Where philosophy might therefore study, reveal, and explain in a clearly intelligible manner what our languages and relationships to things mean, poetry would make those apparent by creating a discrepancy and making us *feel* things in a different way. It is from this contrast ("poetry produces felt variations in the appearances"), that is to say, out of this difference, that a realisation of the complexity of our relationships to things comes—a complexity which is both fundamental (*a priori*) and

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<sup>94</sup> Cavell writes, as quoted at the beginning of this fourth chapter: "I see both developments—ordinary language philosophy and American transcendentalism—as responses to skepticism" (*In Quest* 4).

potential, insofar as the possibility of alternatives, of a plurality of understandings, then also becomes apparent.

Critchley's point on feeling and his associating it with poetry is moreover a reframing, or a reformulating, of Heidegger's idea that poetry pertains to the logic of the heart as opposed to the cognitively explicit logic of the mind. Critchley indeed discusses the German philosopher's ideas before and after the passage quoted above; for instance, agreeing with Heidegger, the British philosopher writes: "It is discourse that lets us see what shows itself, it is the activity of talking that reactivates our prior and *a priori* understanding of things" (287). If poetry is a *different* discourse or way of talking that reveals or "reactivates" fundamental "understanding[s] of things" all the while manifesting alternative ones, and if part of what it reveals, or makes us realise, is that this complexity is covered up by familiarity or scepticism, then a *philosophical* discourse with similar aims is also likely to be poetic. Indeed, if a philosophical discourse with similar aims adopts a "cognitively explicit" discourse, it manifests not what it claims, but falls back into a mode of thinking and "talking" corresponding to the logic of the mind and knowledge-grasping scepticism. This explains why Heidegger turned away from a more traditional towards a more poetic way of writing, why Emerson's style is quite literary, and why both authors also wrote poems: the complexities revealed by poetry cannot fully be expressed in a straightforward and reductively transparent argumentative prose. Philosophical attempts at revealing, explaining, unpacking what poetry reveals are therefore like stretched bridges that aim at bringing the sceptical, logical, knowledge-seeking stance to acknowledge and approach a *different* stance—poetry. The ontological and interpretative wealth and complexity that a non-cognitively explicit discourse (poetry) harbours, reveals, and makes possible is what Emerson and Heidegger want to introduce to their more sceptical and traditionally philosophically-minded readers.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Cavell's ways of writing is distinctly personal and more ordinarily complex than that of philosophers trying to express their

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<sup>95</sup> This introduction to a perspective which is both fundamental and radical or revolutionary moreover corresponds to ideas Emerson and Heidegger had about their respective nations. That is to say, the notion that revealing fundamental, *a priori*, wealth is also revealing potential, alternative wealth is a combination, a double-sidedness, which is present in both Emerson and Heidegger's political views. For instance, America is or harbours and will be or will bring about, according to Emerson, ontological and meaningful wealth, since it is a new and different place for re-generation, where humankind can re-start, as in a new Eden. Likewise, for Heidegger, German romantic poetry, particularly Hölderlin's, reveals both the fundamental, *a priori* wealth of the German language and its folklore *and* all the potential it harbours for the nation, including as cultural crucible for its future.

thought with traditional concision and clarity because he manifests and reveals, through his own writing, the complexities harboured by our ordinary way of thinking, of relating to things, and of using words.

What is at stake in poetry—but also in other ways of writing that aim at manifesting or revealing fundamental and potential complexities—is therefore what Critchley writes in his analysis of Wallace Stevens’s poetry: “it is in and through their seemings that things are the things that they are” (“Surfaciality” 288). Heidegger makes the same point in his phenomenological work *Being and Time*, and it is a “statement” which “points in two directions,” Critchley continues: “both the declaration of the fragility and uncertainty of what is being proposed and the elevation of possibility over any form of actuality” (“Surfaciality” 288). This “declaration” or acknowledgement of fragility, or uncertainty—which comes from the wealth and complexity—together with an emphasis (“elevation”) on its wealth or potential (“possibility”) is what this investigation argues poetry manifests, and it is also what Emerson, Heidegger, and Cavell’s writing aim at conveying through their stretching of conventional philosophical use of language. This awareness of uncertainty and potential is also ethical insofar as it puts one in a reflexive stance—of “unlearning” (“Surfaciality” 287)—that re-considers one’s relationships to things. It also opens the possibility for authentic care as Critchley’s following reference to Heidegger’s notion of “being there with things” makes further apparent: “By listening to the poet’s words, we are drawn outside and beyond ourselves to a condition of being there with things where they do not stand over against us as objects, but where we stand with those things in an experience of what I like to call, with a nod to Rilke, *openedness*, a being open to things” (“Surfaciality” 287). This bringing about of an awareness of uncertainty, complexity and potential—which means getting readers to (re)consider their stances, certainties and definitions by putting them face to face with fundamental and possible ontological and interpretative wealth—is also what Wordsworth’s poetry manifests, as this investigation argued earlier, through his poetic use of the supernatural and of the ordinarily superstitious and interpretative.

Coming back to the notion that Critchley’s text underscores how apparently opposite forms of poetry can be subsumed under the notion that they manifest care, it is worth pointing out that his article starts with—and initially solely focuses on—an analysis of poems by Fernando Pessoa, of which the British philosopher writes that it seeks to “avoid



the sceptical and mystical impulses” which entails “resisting two temptations, the philosophical and the poetic” (“Surfaciality” 285). What this statement means is that, according to Critchley, Pessoa’s poetry aims at putting the reader in front of experiences of things, in other words, that it is akin to phenomenology. “I want to imagine poetry as phenomenology,” Critchley thus writes (“Surfaciality” 287), defining the latter term as “a matter of opening one’s eyes and seeing the palpably obvious fact of the world that faces one and that one faces” (“Surfaciality” 287). What Critchley’s article does, is pull Pessoa away from logico-positivism and towards phenomenology, by interpreting Pessoa’s work in a way that makes him correspond to Critchley’s idea of poetry, the poetry he “want[s] to imagine.” In other words, Critchley argues that even outwardly anti-imaginative or anti-Romantic poetry—such as Pessoa’s, which Critchley calls “anti-poetry” (“Surfaciality” 283)—achieves what Heidegger argues poetry does. Indeed, Critchley contends that Pessoa’s poetry is phenomenological in a Heideggerian sense, and that it expresses Rilkean ideas—which are those Heidegger discusses in his later essays. Critchley’s article therefore points towards a reconciliation of Pessoa and Wordsworth, of Heidegger’s early phenomenological work and of his later essays, of OLP and of poetry. What explains that they can be reconciled, that is to say, what I argue is common to these, is authentic care.

Critchley writes that Pessoa rejects Romantic, imaginative or mystical poetry because he associates poetry with the *extraordinary*—extraordinary uses of language and extraordinary themes, including supernatural ones. In other words, he associates poetry with *the failure to acknowledge* the wealth of complexity of ordinary things and words whereas he is interested in what presents itself in banal circumstances, in things and words as they present themselves ordinarily—which is also what OLP and phenomenology are interested in. However, what, according to Critchley, Pessoa’s stance fails to recognise, and what some ordinary language philosophers also fail to recognise,<sup>96</sup> is that “[t]he world which we confront is not just a world of ‘facts’ but a world upon which our imagination has, at any given moment, already worked,” as Iris Murdoch puts it (*Existentialists* 199). This a point also made by Wordsworth, and it is one which Heidegger also makes in *Being and*

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<sup>96</sup> I say this because Ludwig Wittgenstein, particularly his early work, has been associated with the rationalism of logico-positivist philosophy, including by Michael LeMahieu who writes: “A philosophy that considers language as a transparent medium that is perfectly calibrated to cognition—as appears to be the case when Wittgenstein stipulates that the limits of language are the limits of thought—fails to acknowledge obscure situations or incomprehensible people” (63).

*Time*—without using the term “imagination” as such—as Chapter One of this investigation pointed out. Critchley usefully summarises this in the following passage from his article entitled “Poetry as Philosophy – on Wallace Stevens” and in which he quotes Stevens: “The world does not first and foremost show itself as an ‘object’ contemplatively and disinterestedly viewed by a ‘subject’. Rather, the world shows itself as a place in which we are completely immersed and from which we do not radically distinguish ourselves: ‘Real and unreal are two in one’” (187).<sup>97</sup> Critchley likewise writes, commenting, in *Things Merely Are*, on Friedrich Schlegel’s statement “no poetry, no reality”: “that is, our experience of the real is dependent upon the work of the poetic imagination” (25).<sup>98</sup> As a result of this, imaginative works of literature convey more accurately the complexity of our relationships with the world. Thus, Stevens’s “conviction,” Critchley writes, “is that a poeticized, imaginatively transformed reality is both preferable to an inhuman, contracted and oppressive sense of reality and gives a truer picture of the relation humans entertain with the world” (*Things* 28). Although Critchley does not explain what he means by an “inhuman, contracted and oppressive sense of reality,” his choice of words and the way he contrasts this “sense of reality” with the poetic and imaginative one conveyed by literature suggests he shares Emerson and Heidegger’s criticisms of traditional, reductive philosophical or scientific stances and discourses that emphasise detachment, rationality, abstraction, and so-called objectivity.

Indeed, unlike poets—as Critchley’s words above have helped further establish—sceptics “use words apart from and in opposition to the complexities of practical interaction with an active world,” Mulhall points out in his commentary on Cavell’s work (*Stanley* 152). That is to say, sceptics do not use words with ordinary aims and ambitions, such as to convey their personal beliefs or views in a given context; instead, they tend to claim to be universally intelligible and to reach unambiguous and definitive, timeless and objective truths. Mulhall explains this as follows: “The specific form of scepticism adduced here results in the freezing or fixation of subjects and objects because it represses or ignores the fact that words are the possession of creatures who must act in a changing world which acts upon them . . . both words and world are frozen, fixed, fixated—

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<sup>97</sup> Critchley also writes the exact same words in *Things Merely Are* (29).

<sup>98</sup> Earlier in this chapter I quoted Murdoch writing, in a similar way, that “[t]he formulation of beliefs about other people often proceeds and must proceed imaginatively and under a pressure of the will,” and that, as a result, “[w]e have to *attend* to people, we may have to have *faith* in them” (*Existentialists* 199).

themselves deprived of life" (*Stanley* 152). Thus, when left in the sceptic's hands (or care), not only do things and the world become decontextualized, fixed, impersonal and inanimate as on a dissecting table, but the same is true of words. By contrast, poetry does not aim for a fixed, intelligible and objective knowledge about the world, and poets do not view words as labels for objects and as universal logical connectors—they are aware that "all language is vehicular and transitive," as Emerson puts it in "The Poet" (*Essays* 463). Whereas "both words and world are frozen" for the sceptic, the poet un-fixes or de-freezes the world—by countering limited and absolutist ontological assertions about what things *are*—and it also does so by unfixing words, including by drawing attention to the wealth of potential and contextual meanings that words and their combinations contain. Context, co-text, sounds, collocations, connotations all actively participate in creating a plurality of meanings that is open to interpretation. Cavell's ideas, and the way they are understood by Mulhall, thus allow for a contrast between, on the one hand, the sceptic's death-dealing, fixing, defining, and objectifying discourse, and, on the other hand, the poet's life-giving, un-fixing, opening and othering work. On this account, a poem provides a space where both ontological and linguistic or semantic wealth thrive, where what things are and what words mean always remains, to some extent, open, foreign and ungraspable. In other words, ontological and semantic wealth is, in a poem, authentically cared for—acknowledged and respected, i.e., loved, in the previously discussed sense of that word.<sup>99</sup>

When further explaining how reconsidering our everyday words and relationships with things—and becoming aware of alternatives—is possible, Mulhall uses the following

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<sup>99</sup> For more on such ideas and how they are shared by other authors in relation to ethics and interpersonal relationships, see, for instance, Paul Hamilton's idea, in chapter ten of his book *Metaromanticism*, on discursive reserve: "'Reserve,' as I commend it throughout this discussion, links surplus, unspoken linguistic competence to respect for the individuality of one's interlocutor—a discursive ethics, as Habermas might optimistically claim, which is progressive because it continuously increases communicative (and, one might add, literary) resources" (214). Similar links between linguistic potential and ethics, particularly in relation to poetry, are also developed in Levinas's (and post-Levinasian, including Jacques Derrida's and Derek Attridge's) works, as Michael Eskin explains in his doctoral dissertation entitled "Encounters." In its sub-section entitled "Ethics and Poetry" he thus writes: "As the interruption of ethics, poetry replicates ethics as the interruption of politics, and semethics as the interruption of Being, which in turn informs both ethics and politics; thus poetry—being socio-politically interruptive par excellence—exemplarily accomplishes the critical task of ethics and thereby, ironically, reveals its deeply political significance" (82). Quoting Levinas, Eskin continues: "Poetry exceeds [sic.] the 'limits of what may be thought by [merely] suggesting, by letting be understood without ever rendering understandable-by implying meanings which differ from meanings acquired by signs through the simultaneity of a system or through the logical definition of concepts. . . ." (82).

words: “By allowing words to draw us through their complexities of sense . . . we allow them to make or recover connections and associations of meaning in ourselves . . . allowing them to interpret aspects of our own life back to us in a way which reanimates it” (*Stanley* 177). I have argued that such words describe what a poem is able to trigger, as an enabler or facilitator of the “allowing” Mulhall describes—especially since he writes that the reader’s attitude is a “being passive” (*Stanley* 177). Such receptivity is indeed part of Emerson and Heidegger’s arguments on poets and poetry, as the first two chapters of this investigation showed. However, Mulhall’s words do not describe poetry—not even literature at this point in his text—but Cavell’s own work, which pertains to ordinary language philosophy. If Mulhall’s words are a fitting description of processes at play in both poetry and Cavell’s work, it is because both are philosophically linked by the idea of authentically caring for the words we use and the relationships we have with things. This becomes even more apparent when one considers what Mulhall writes about scepticism and how OLP—Wittgenstein in particular—offers a philosophical response to it:

The sceptic . . . divorces himself from his own life of practical interaction with the world – deprives himself of life. The practice of recovery or reanimation that Wittgenstein offers is that of reminding us of . . . the means by which and the terms in which the things of the world count for us, matter to us; and in reminding us of this, in getting us to acknowledge this, he gives us the opportunity of reviving our interest in the world, of reinvesting it with our care and concern and so reviving our interest in our own lives. (*Stanley* 162)

Wittgenstein’s philosophy, Mulhall explains, “gives us an opportunity,” which means that it is an invitation towards, and that it acts as an enabler or facilitator of a “reviving [of] our interest in the world” and “in our own lives.” Mulhall’s term “reviving,” like his use of “reanimation” refers to the previously discussed idea of giving the world back ontological and interpretative complexity—as if the world and things were animate, unknown and to be cautiously acknowledged—as opposed to it being deadened by the sceptic’s life-depriving stance of detachment, objectification and knowledge grasping. Such a “reviving” means, in fact, “reinvesting” the world “with our care and concern,” Mulhall writes, because what “reanimation” of the world—being able to view it as animate, unknown and to be cautiously acknowledged—means, is reconsidering our relationships to that world. What Mulhall says Wittgenstein offers—which corresponds to what Cavell argues OLP offers<sup>100</sup>—is therefore what I have argued poetry offers: the possibility for authentic care. In both cases, what is at stake and what is aimed at both by poetry and by OLP is a shift out

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<sup>100</sup> In *In Quest of the Ordinary* (4), Cavell makes synecdochical use of the pair Emerson and Thoreau to refer to American Transcendentalism, and of the pair Austin and Wittgenstein to refer to OLP.

of a reductive position of knowledge, and into a more respectful position that acknowledges ontological wealth, interpretative complexity and relational potential. Like OLP, poetry provides an opportunity of becoming aware of and of reconsidering how we care—that is to say, how we relate to things, people, words, and the world. It does so through an acknowledgement of and a respect for complexity, and because it lets go of claims to *know* people, things, or situations thoroughly.

Close attention to the ordinary, whether poetic or philosophical—insofar as OLP also pursues similar aims—thus allows one to become aware of both existing and potential relationships with or interpretations of things, as Mulhall explains:

the terms of our present life with these objects contains the terms for transfiguring that life (developing or recovering it) . . . and a grammatical investigation of those terms can accordingly have a revolutionary, life-restoring and/or life-enhancing potential. . . . [T]he *actual* everyday is not only not necessarily what must be accepted but may even be what must be refused in favour of the real possibilities[;] . . . the actual everyday contains the terms of the eventual everyday—and may even instantiate it if those possibilities have only been forgotten by philosophy and not by our culture as a whole. (*Stanley* 165)

OLP aims to undertake the kind of “grammatical investigation” Mulhall mentions, but the terms he uses to describe it (as having “revolutionary, life-restoring and/or life-enhancing potential”) are those Cavell uses to describe Romantic poetry in *In Quest of the Ordinary*—as the earlier parts of this chapter pointed out. Likewise, this investigation pointed out how poetry, according to Heidegger and Emerson before him, reveals or “instantiate[s]” a wealth of semantic and ontological “potential,” and how those are “possibilities [that] have been forgotten by philosophy.” Mulhall’s words therefore help reveal how the philosophical value of poetry—understood as manifesting care and as fostering authentic care—becomes further apparent when one considers the characteristics it shares with OLP.

## 5. Closing Remarks

This chapter’s exploration of Cavell’s works first engaged with his claim that Wordsworth, Emerson, and even Heidegger—insofar as Cavell suggests that the German philosopher’s ideas may constitute “a philosophy of romanticism” (*In Quest* 66)—offer “responses to scepticism” (*In Quest* 4). I pointed out the philosophical connections between the notion that poetry manifests care and Cavell’s ideas about both ordinary accommodation to ambiguity and poetry’s re-animating and re-domesticating characteristics—which he contrasts with scepticism’s deadening grasping after certainty. I moreover showed how the anti-sceptical acknowledgement of and openness to otherness

that Cavell describes pertains to authentic care, including such as poetry manifests it according to Heidegger. Lastly, I discussed Cavell's work in light of its analysis by scholars such as Mulhall and Critchley in order to show how Cavell's ideas underscore the value of poetry as a manifestation of care, both for the history of ideas and literary theory—particularly poetics. This chapter thus brought into focus the argument that poetry provides a disclosure of the human experience that is more respectful of phenomenological complexity and of the wealth of meanings that things and our relationships to them harbour—including ordinary ones—than what sceptical rationalist philosophers traditionally acknowledge. Ordinary Language Philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Cavell have sought to change this tendency, like Heidegger and Emerson before them, and this investigation has shown that in spite of their different approaches or foci, when read through the lens of the notion that poetry manifests care, Cavell, Heidegger, Emerson, and Wordsworth's works converge. That is to say, all four authors' views can be subsumed under the idea that poetry manifests care, which is a useful and pervasive concept for the history of ideas about poetry at least from the early nineteenth through to the early twenty-first century. Sandra Laugier provides arguments that further highlight this continuity and the ways in which OLP in general—and Cavell in particular—puts forward arguments that stress the relevance—as well as the ethical dimension—of the notion that poetry manifests care. Briefly turning to some of the points she makes is therefore a way of drawing this discussion of Cavell's work to a close that will highlight the ethical aspects of the relationships this chapter has established between the American philosopher's ideas, poetry, and care.

In "The Ethics of Care as a Politics of the Ordinary," Laugier points out how "the ordinary is variously denied, undervalued, or neglected (not seen, not taken into account) in theoretical thought" (217). Laugier's criticism does not contrast "theoretical thought" with poetry, but with ordinary language philosophy; however, just as poetry invites us to reconsider our relationships to things and our use of words, OLP, likewise, is "a philosophy that calls our attention to ordinary lives by attending to ordinary details of language and expression, as having moral weight and importance" ("The Ethics" 218). According to Laugier, theoretical thought tends to overlook both details and the ordinary, whereas other forms of philosophical thinking—such as OLP—that attend to and that draw our attention to "details of language and expression," better reflect—and reflect upon—the complexity of human experience. Literature, and, as this investigation has shown, poetry in particular,

is able to put the spotlight on such details, and to foster awareness and a careful attentiveness to them—which also explains why literature has a prominent place in Cavell’s works. So as to better understand Laugier’s arguments and the links between literature, OLP, and attentive care to detail, it is worth turning to a point she makes in “Transcendentalism and the Ordinary.” Quoting Emerson, she writes:

[A]ttention to the ordinary, ‘to what we would like to know the meaning of’ (Emerson 1982: 564), is the perception of textures or of moral motifs. What is perceived is not objects but expressions. . . . Literature is the privileged place of this perception, through the creation of a background that reveals the important differences between the expressions. . . . It is a matter of a competence which has to do not only with knowledge and reasoning, but with learning the suitable expression, and with an education of sensibility: education of the reader’s sensibility to the author, who renders such a situation, such a character perceptible, while placing it (describing it) in the appropriate framework. (9)

Laugier’s notion of an “education of sensibility” suggests the necessity for an “education of the eye” (Emerson, *The Journals*, 13:437) and her mention of a “background” or “framework” in or against which details can be perceived reformulates Emerson’s description of the poet as someone who reattaches objects to a wider context so as to make sense of them.<sup>101</sup> Literature, and poetry in particular, invites readers to reconsider their relationships with, and their understandings of, things, people, or words, as well as the consequences of their stances, notably because it is able to manifest how we care—as my analyses of Emerson’s “Each and All” and Wordsworth’s “The Thorn” have contributed to show. The necessity to be attentive both to a thing’s details and to how its meaning poetically rises within a background and in relation to the larger fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities is a point that Heidegger also stresses, as discussed in Chapter One of this investigation. Moreover, authentically caring for things through a receptive attentiveness that is considerate of the ordinary, of details, and of the proximate—as opposed to sceptically grasping for knowledge of isolated and objectified things—is a stance that Cavell’s works repeatedly put forward as well. This chapter has shown this by studying Cavell’s use of terms such as “reception,” (*Conditions* 39) “domestication,”

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<sup>101</sup> See, for instance, Chapter Two’s analysis of Emerson’s poem “Each and All,” as well my discussion of his essay “Poetry and the Imagination.” As David M. Robinson puts it, according to Emerson “poetic knowledge is thus the pursuit of the larger contextual pattern that will make sense of an individual object by demonstrating its relation to the whole” (192).

(*Conditions* 61) or even “accommodation” (*Philosophy* 138), his analyses of Emerson’s ideas, and his discussions of Romanticism and poetry in *In Quest of the Ordinary*.

Because poetry manifests, conveys, and fosters close attention and authentic care towards things and their details that tend to be overlooked, it has the ability to help us “finally see what is under our noses,” as Critchley was earlier quoted putting it (“Surfaciality” 287). This feature, and the fact that “[w]hat the poet discovers is what we knew already, but had covered up,” as Critchley argues (“Surfaciality” 287), suggests that poetry shares characteristics not only with OLP, but also with the ethics of care. Indeed, Critchley’s words about poetry are similar to those Laugier uses to describe care ethics: “The ethics of care draws our attention to the ordinary, to what we are unable to see, to what is right before our eyes and is for this very reason invisible to us” (“The Ethics” 218). What care ethics “draws our attention to” is thus both, according to Laugier, what OLP studies and what Emerson, in “The American Scholar” urges artists to attend to.<sup>102</sup> Emerson, OLP, and the ethics of care share an interest in the ordinary, and in details within the latter: “Importance lies in details, and this particularism of attention to detail is another obvious feature of OLP that is also central to the ethics of care,” Laugier continues (“The Ethics” 222). What this attention to detail allows both OLP and the ethics of care to uncover is “neglected aspects of life” (“The Ethics” 222) and thereby to “make appear what is so close, so immediate, so intimately linked to ourselves that, as a consequence, we do not perceive it”—words used by Michel Foucault to define philosophy’s role, and which Laugier quotes: “Michel Foucault recognized this kind of attention as crucial to the role of philosophy: ‘We have long known that the role of philosophy is not to discover what is hidden, but to render visible what precisely is visible—which is to say, to make appear what is so close, so immediate, so intimately linked to ourselves that, as a consequence, we do not perceive it’” (“The Ethics” 219-20). The core mission of philosophy as Foucault understands it is thus one which, according to Laugier, both the ethics of care and Cavell, as an ordinary language philosopher, share, and it is a mission Heidegger, Emerson, and Wordsworth ascribe to poets, as the first three chapters of this study have demonstrated.

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<sup>102</sup> Laugier discusses Emerson’s essay, notably his words “[w]hat would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan” (*Essays* 69) in her article “Transcendentalism and the Ordinary” (2). As discussed in Chapter Three of this investigation, Wordsworth also has a declared focus on the ordinary since he writes, in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, that the poet “considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life” (*Prose*, 1:140).



The fact that Laugier's works establish philosophical connections between the ethics of care, Cavell's ideas, and Emerson's texts is not the only sign that the notion that poetry manifests care, like Cavell's ideas, shares an ethical aspect that suggests a philosophical overlap with care ethics that would be worth studying further. Another such sign lies in the fact that Cavell is critical of the abstractions of rational idealism all the while establishing a parallel between Emerson's philosophical stance and Hume's—a critical stance shared by Joan Tronto who also discusses Hume's work in her book on the ethics of care entitled *Moral Boundaries*. Indeed, while she explains that “the ethic of care will have some resemblances to Scottish thought” (58)—by which she chiefly refers to moral sentimentalism—Cavell explains, about Emerson, that “[h]is direct opponent is rather, as Hume's is, the reputedly sophisticated philosopher” (*The Senses* 147). Cavell's statement hints at the fact that Hume and Emerson—like him, Heidegger, Wordsworth, and several care ethicists—point out the limits of purely rational, abstract, and universal stances while putting forward the value of more ordinary, particular, and emotional ones. Thus, in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, Cavell mentions how “Kant famously, scandalously, says that a mother who cares for her child out of affection rather than for the sake of the moral law exhibits no moral worth” (46-7). Whereas for Kant morality is strictly a matter of abiding by abstract and universal laws, care ethicists—as well as Wordsworth, Emerson, Heidegger, and Cavell—wish to stress or rehabilitate the importance and worth of local, individual, day-to-day responses and relationships to things. As Laugier puts it, the ethics of care seek “to valorize moral values like caring, attention to others, and solicitude” (“The Ethics” 217). In order to do this and to qualify purely reason-based moral philosophies, care ethicists such as Tronto therefore draw on moral sentimentalism because philosophers such as Hume point out how the passions can move us to actions that have moral worth. Indeed, for Hume, “there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such. . . . [People] affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours” (*Treatise* 481)—a statement I discussed in Chapter Three of this investigation where I explained its relation to Wordsworth's ideas about poetry. The importance of affective proximity and encounters—including through poetic representations—is stressed by all the major authors studied in this investigation, and this convergence also noticed by Heikki A. Kovalainen who points out an overlap between Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Emerson's ideas: “ethics has to do with something more fundamental, perhaps something like an original encounter with the being of the world, a

genuine attentiveness to the particularity of our experience, rendering ethics possible in the first place” (3). Even though Kovalainen does not mention Cavell, many of the latter’s works focus on Wittgenstein, and “a genuine attentiveness to the particularity of our experience” is a key feature of both the American philosopher’s works, of OLP in general, and of care ethics, as Laugier was quoted pointing out (“The Ethics” 222). Delving deeper into the links between Cavell’s work in ordinary language philosophy, the idea that poetry manifests authentic care, and care ethics would be worthwhile, but such an enquiry lies beyond the scope of this investigation as an entire chapter would be necessary to discuss and to do justice to the complexity of the ideas put forward by care ethicists, whose works span the fields of political science, sociology, philosophy, and feminist studies. Nevertheless, what these few paragraphs concluding this chapter have shown, with the help of Laugier, is that Cavell’s works and the idea of poetry as a manifestation of care have ethical aspects that suggest far-reaching philosophical connections with care ethics that would be worth investigating further.



## Conclusion

This discussion of poetry and care in the works of Heidegger, Emerson, Wordsworth, and Cavell has uncovered some of the philosophical origins and legacies of these four authors' ideas and has shown how the Heideggerian concept of care—and the notion that poetry manifests it—helps demonstrate these connections. The concept of care has proved to be a useful tool for studies pertaining to the history of ideas as well as literary theory, and poetics in particular, since, like a lens or a catalyst, it has revealed new interpretations of, and new implications for, these authors' works, particularly with regard to phenomenology, ontology, and ethics. Chapter One of this investigation helped define the notion that poetry manifests care by studying both Heidegger's early phenomenological work *Being and Time* and some of his later essays in the collection *Poetry, Language, Thought*. My discussion of the Heideggerian notions of solicitude and concern, of listening and keeping silent as opposed to idle talk and speaking extensively showed that poetry pertains to authenticity, particularly because of the ways it is characterised by dwelling, by a Pascalian logic of the heart, and by a tarrying alongside things—as opposed to the objectifying and reductive Cartesian logic of the mind. I thereby demonstrated that poetry, as Heidegger's later work describes it, manifests care as his early work defines it; more specifically, insofar as the poet's work is characterised by careful and respectful attention to the Being of things and people, it manifests authentic care. Chapter Two then investigated the ways in which, on the topic of poetry, "Emerson's thought is . . . a direct anticipation of Heidegger's" (Cavell, *Conditions* 38). Assessing the extent to which poetry manifests care according to Emerson revealed the phenomenological and ontological dimensions of his ideas on poetry and showed how, like the German philosopher, Emerson associates the poet with an authentically caring way of being. This chapter also discussed the American writer's call for poetic attention to the ordinary and pointed out how, like Heidegger, Emerson is critical of the ontological paucity of unpoetic, detached, de-contextualised, purely reason-based, and objectifying ways of relating to people or things—a point underscored in his poem "Each and All," which was also shown to manifest authentic care. Further enquiry into the origins of the notion that poetry manifests care led me to discuss, in Chapter Three, some of Wordsworth's prose writings about poetry, as well as his poem "The Thorn" from *Lyrical Ballads*. I pointed out the ways in which both proto-

phenomenological views and legacies of Hume's epistemology, scepticism, and moral sentimentalism were perceptible in those works. My reading of "The Thorn" offered to interpret this poem as a manifestation of care that demonstrates the narrator's inability to care authentically because of his entrapment between sceptical and superstitious stances. This discussion of care in some of Wordsworth's poetry and prose also brought to the fore ethical questions as well as interrogations about poetical and philosophical relationships to the ordinary. Such issues were then further discussed in Chapter Four, which focused on Cavell's works as well as analyses by Mulhall, Critchley, and Laugier. This chapter's exploration of the philosophical connections between, Wordsworth, Emerson, Heidegger, and Cavell's views pointed out how these four authors discuss poetry in relation to scepticism and other stances that are bent on objectivity, detachment, and a rationality that goes as far as overlooking more fundamental and ordinary relationships to the world. I showed that all four authors call for a converse and careful attention to the latter, and that their works converge on the point of how poetry acknowledges and reveals the phenomenological complexity, the ontological wealth, and the potential meanings that ordinary things and our relationships to them harbour. I ultimately discussed the ethical dimension of such a call and of this understanding of poetry as a manifestation of care, and concluded by pointing out how this ethical aspect suggests philosophical connections between the notion that poetry manifests care and contemporary care ethics.

Although I already briefly discussed, in the concluding paragraphs of each of these chapters, both the limitations of my analyses and the opportunities for further study that these four chapters point towards, I would like to briefly mention additional topics worth exploring in the wake of this investigation. First, it would be worth asking whether the authentic care—i.e. the respectful and affective attention to what things are (which includes the wider network of relations, or world, of which they are a part)—that is characteristic of the figures of the poet discussed in this investigation is something that poetry is indeed able to foster, concretely. I raise this point partly because in the opening paragraph of the introduction to this study I briefly mentioned articles discussing the benefits of poetry workshops for staff and patients in palliative care wards. It would therefore be interesting to determine whether there is an overlap between, on the one hand, how and why poetry is read, discussed, or written during such workshops, and, on the other hand, the notion of authentic care and poetry as this investigation has described it. Taking this question beyond medical contexts, and asking it about the field of education

in particular, would also be worthwhile, especially if one bears in mind the philosophical links with care ethics which were pointed out at the end of the last chapter of this study. For instance, do the latter connections suggest that there might be socio-political and ethical benefits to the promotion of the reading, discussion, and writing of poetry? Another point I wish to make is that this theoretical work on poetry as a manifestation of care could lead to more evaluative discussions and analyses of poems. Such a study could for instance analyse different kinds of poems so as to determine what the notion that poetry manifests care is able to reveal about poetry of varying kinds, styles, and periods. Moreover, poetry as this investigation discussed it encompasses much more than poesy—for Emerson like for Heidegger, language is essentially poetry<sup>103</sup>—so it would also be interesting to try determine whether the notion that poetry manifests care can be extended beyond poetics and literary criticism. In other words, is this notion useful for and relevant to all works of art, as is suggested, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” by Heidegger’s description of a painting by Van Gogh (*Poetry* 19) and by his claim that “[t]he nature of art is poetry” (*Poetry* 72)? One way of starting such an exploration could be to further discuss Cavell’s works about drama and films from the 1930s, as well as Murdoch and Laugier’s claims about fiction and its ethical value, particularly since these kinds of works of art share one key characteristic with the narrative lyric poem I discussed (“The Thorn”): they tell a story. Whether storytelling and narrative modes of expression are poetic and manifest care in ways that others do not—and conversely—would thus be worth investigating. In spite of not having been able to address questions such as these, this investigation hopes to have demonstrated the pertinence of the concept of care, and of the idea that poetry manifests it, for the study of Heidegger, Emerson, Wordsworth, and Cavell’s works, as well as its relevance both for literature—more specifically poetry and poetics—and for the history of ideas, particularly those pertaining to literary theory and criticism.

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<sup>103</sup> Emerson writes in his essay “The Poet” that “[e]very word was once a poem” (*Essays* 455) while Heidegger claims in “The Origin of the Work of Art” that “[l]anguage itself is poetry in the essential sense” (*Poetry* 72).



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